



ROBERT BURNS

*From the engraving by Rogers after the painting
by Nasmyth*

BURN'S
Poetry & Prose

With Essays by
Mackenzie, Jeffrey, Carlyle
and Others

With an Introduction and Notes by
R. DEWAR

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INTRODUCTION

No life of Burns carries more conviction of truth, or frames a more speaking likeness, than the 'honest narrative' of the poet's letter to Dr. Moore in August 1787. Burns was convalescent when he wrote it, and in a 'miserable fog of Ennui'. No one would believe it, if he had not said so. His ennui vanished as he put pen to paper and remembered the close of the story he proposed to tell—the Edinburgh days, the sudden fame of the poet. 'My name', he wrote, 'has made a small noise in the country'; and the words, let fall as by chance, set him in the right path, evoked—what no other life of Burns is, to the same degree—a life of the poet. Other biographers who, less fortunate in their stopping-point, have had to carry the story beyond Edinburgh to Dumfries, give us rather a life of the poet who, because he was 'born a very poor man's son', was put to be a ploughman.

It is not that Burns is silent about the 'poor man's son', or conceals the fact that for long he played against loaded dice in the game of life. But he says more of the game, less of the dice, than his biographers. It is worth remarking that, in his account of his school-days (such as they were), Burns does not emphasize the poverty of his home; and that, when mention of poverty becomes unavoidable—in the period of his father's increasing misfortunes and failing health, from about the poet's fifteenth to his twenty-fifth year—he contrives to get rid of this topic as quickly as possible. What must be said of hardship, he concentrates in a rapid outline of his father's story for these years—relieving the gloom with the episode of his own first love and attempt in rhyme—before retracing his steps to tell the poet's story in fuller detail. And Burns's version

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is superior also in its division of the subject. The usual way is to divide the life at each move to a new home—1766 1777 1784 &c. Burns for the part he has to tell, divides at his seventeenth year (1775) his twenty third (1781) and his twenty-eighth (1786)—these being as he reckoned, the years of most importance in his mental growth and therefore most deserving to be chronicled.

The emphasis should fall not on the poverty of his youth but on the social disposition, described as 'without bounds or limits' even in boyhood, which he opposed to poverty. The poor man's lot never held any terrors for Burns. He believed he could make shift to be happy even though reduced to beg. His lines

The heart aye s the part aye

That makes us right or wrang

do not convey the sentiment commonly attributed to them, if we refer them to their context.¹ They remind us rather that at no time in his life did Burns show an eagerness to get rich. What his 'disposition' thought of poverty can be seen also in the verse-epistles made soon after these lines were written before he knew success, and while the struggle still went on—for example in the epistle *To James Smith*

The star that rules my luckless lot

Has fated me the russet coat

As damnd my fortune to the groat

But in requit

Has blest me with a random shot

O countra wit

An anxious e e I never throws

Behint my lug or by my nose

I jouk beneath Misfortune's blows

As weel s I may

Sworn foe to sorrow care and prose

I rhyme away

¹ See page 37

It may be noted also, in the letter to Moore itself, that, when Burns had to speak of the worst years at Mount Oliphant, not the poverty but the solitariness of life there came first to mind: 'the cheerless gloom of a hermit', he calls it, 'with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave.'

There is, however, one hardship that Burns felt in his youth, and felt the more keenly because of his 'social disposition'—the want of some one to interpret his 'strong appetite for sociability' as not necessarily a sign of the old Adam, as the sign rather of that innocent thing, the artistic temperament. In his infancy, an old maid of his mother's taught him tales and songs; and 'this', he says, 'cultivated the latent seeds of Poesy'. It does not appear that he felt himself similarly indebted to the other teachers of his youth, to his father, and to John Murdoch, the teacher chosen for him by his father. William Burnes deserves all praise for his concern to educate his children. But, with all his insight into 'Men, their manners and their ways', his mind was neither supple nor alert enough to take the measure of his eldest son. The anecdotes concerning their relationship prove only that he found the boy difficult, without thinking to accommodate their disparate views of life. The 'lessons of virtue and piety' by which he strove to correct the 'disposition' of his son, were knowledge loaded, rather than fed, into his pupil; and the process seems on occasion to have bored Burns, 'quick to learn and wise to know' by nature. The result at any rate was that the first exhibitions of the artist in Burns were made in 'polemical divinity'—he became notorious in his early teens for the 'heat and indiscretion' with which he puzzled Calvinism 'in conversation parties on Sundays between sermons'; and his seventeenth year is marked as important, among other things, for his defiance of his father in the incident of the country dancing school, and the

dissipation of his early manhood is attributed (in part) to his father's dislike of him from that time. John Murdoch, but a youth himself, was the schoolmaster who at the cost of some thrashings taught Burns English grammar and made him by the age of ten absolutely a critic in substantives, verbs and particles. Gilbert Burns after his brother's death—milded perhaps by the thrashings—exaggerated this and started the idea that these lessons in grammar were an important factor in the unfolding of the poet's genius and character. The claim sounds odd beside Murdoch's own considered estimate of his pupil written in 1799. Gilbert, he says, always appeared to me to possess a more lively imagination and to be more of the wit than Robert. If any person who knew the boys had been asked which of them was the most likely to court the Muses, he would surely have never guessed that Robert had a propensity of that kind. If as Gilbert says Burns soon became remarkable for the fluency and correctness of his expression, this was due less to Murdoch and his lessons in grammar than to the fact—admitted by Gilbert as an afterthought of no importance—that from his earliest years the poet was a reader when he could get a book. There is a letter Burns wrote to Murdoch in 1783 from which it seems fair to infer that not the grammarian but the moralist in his teacher struck Burns most and that he remembered his school-days generally as a time of imperfect sympathy with the aims of his teachers. All the pains of an indulgent father and a masterly teacher had availed only to keep him 'pretty clear of vicious habits' nothing more positive had resulted from their schemes to make a man of him. As a man of the world, he was 'most miserably deficient the reverse of 'an active pushing fellow'. And his excuse—for he was afraid this recital would not please—is the mildest of hints that he was meant

for other flights than Murdoch and his father designed for their pupils; that, after ways of his own devising, he was finding life a bigger and a better thing than their teaching had reported it. 'I seem to be one sent into the world', he says, 'to see and observe; and I very easily compound with the knave who tricks me of my money, if there be anything original about him which shews me human nature in a different light from anything I have seen before.' And again: 'I forget that I am a poor insignificant devil, unnoticed and unknown, stalking up and down fairs and markets, when I happen to be in them reading a page or two of Mankind, and "catching the manners living as they rise", whilst the men of business jostle me on every side as an idle incumbrance in their way.' By 1783, of course, the 'social disposition' that rebelled in 1775 had had an innings. The studied impenitence of this excuse could hardly otherwise have been possible: for, strangely enough, Burns wrote it when his fortunes were at their lowest ebb—when his father was past work and visibly dying, and, at Lochlea, ruin more complete than threatened at Mount Oliphant was already well in sight. The dissipation he had substituted for his father's lessons since 1775 was clearly helping Burns to understand and put faith in the 'disposition' that prompted it. It had been a tougher fight against the doctrines of his early teachers than against poverty; but the artist in Burns was giving him the victory as before. It is the more interesting to note that, as he hints the gain to have been greater than the loss, notions and sentiments fall from his pen which in two years time were to shine in the terser idiom of his verse: one of them is in the last sentence quoted above, the verse for which will be found in the epistle *To William Simpson*.¹ In less than two years' time, when, after their father's death, the brothers had

¹ Lines 91-6 (p. 49).

contrived to make a new start in Mossiel Burns was to write *The Vision* and Colley's lines in that poem¹ are an unqualified defence of the rebellion of 1775 which they obviously record.

For what had dissipation meant for Burns? A furious interest in the amours of his parish and his own goddesses, which made him live for the gloaming caring for the labours of the day only while in actual exercise, Kirkoswald and its smugglers and Irvine which taught him—the former to look unconcernedly on a large tavern-bill and mix without fear in a drunken squabble—the latter to speak of a certain fashionable failing with levity.² All this he admits and partly allows as evil. But there is more to the account. Irvine showed him something of a town life. Kirkoswald mankind in a new phase. The new life that is to say had meant also wider and more various opportunities for observing men and the passions of men. It was Burns's greatest need when he broke out of the old habit (which he still retained) of reading 'when he could get a book' was to come to harvest. The chance of finding their parallels in experience fixed the images of his book-reading—now chiefly in poetry and works of imagination—and gave them body and power as never before. He read Shenstone's Works at Kirkoswald in 1775 and Kirkoswald and Shenstone between them sent him home ambitious to form a letter writing coterie of his friends on the Warwickshire model. But as we should expect in one with whom love and poesy began together it was the songs he read or heard sung and the love affairs of his new life that between them did most to bring out the writer in Burns. He found that his passions when they were once lighted up raged like so many devils till they got vent in rhyme. He found also even in these years that the rhyme came

¹ *Lives* i. 1-6 (p. 55).

easiest when the passion suggested a model for his verses that had been heard rather than read, when a tune guided him more than a former poet's lines. Mostly it was so with the few passion-inspired pieces that have survived from this time. The poet's lines guided him most in this period, not when his rhymes were passion-born, but when they eased him of some mood of depression, induced by considering his father's lot or 'dislike' of his ways. In such moods he wrote *Winter : a dirge*—a strange piece for the tune of 'Macpherson's Farewell'—and the song *I dream'd I lay where flowers were springing*, for which no tune is indicated, and which poaches freely on Mrs. Cockburn's version of *The Flowers of the Forest*. On one occasion also—it seems to have been when the factor's letters at Mount Oliphant used to set them all in tears—a mood of this kind carried him so far from song and song-tunes that, as he puts it, 'nothing less would serve me than courting the Tragic Muse'; and he wrote *A Fragment in the Hour of Remorse, on Seeing a Fellow-Creature in Misery, whom I had known in Better Days*; in blank verse that would rather rhyme, it is the poorest thing he ever made.

And yet Burns was not to win his spurs as a lyric poet : songs are an almost negligible part of the Kilmarnock and of the various Edinburgh editions of his works. He was to devote himself to other forms of writing before he became known. Two things contributed to bring this about.

Towards the end of 1781—the second of his important years—Burns, wishing 'to set about doing something in life' (Gilbert says he wished to marry), made his first serious attempt to turn man of the world. He despaired of farming, which he saw to be fast ruining his father for the second time, and decided to try flax-dressing. It was this venture that took him to Irvine; and till the venture failed, and Burns returned to Lochlea and the ill-luck that was piling

up there—except some religious pieces', significantly enough—he wrote nothing. But not long apparently after his return from Irvine Burns chanced upon the poems of Robert Fergusson and Fergusson re-converted him to poetry. Scott thought that Burns talked of his models, Ramsay and Fergusson 'with too much humility'. It was gratitude that misled his judgement of Fergusson if it was misled. This poet from humble circumstances not unlike his own had been piloted to fame by a disposition very like his own but this was not all. Allan Ramsay, Hamilton of Gilbertfield, all the models Burns had possessed till now in the vernacular were men of the past before London had come to be the influence it was by Burns's day on Scottish manners and taste—an influence of which his own schooling in English was symptomatic. Fergusson was a contemporary. Born in 1750 he had died in 1774 having published his book in the previous year—at the very age Burns himself had reached when he first read it. And this contemporary though he bowed to the prevailing taste by writing one half of his book in English had achieved fame by the other half—poems in which he handled the idiom and metres of Scots more cunningly, and with less adulteration of English than Ramsay himself had done in a more favourable age. It would have been odd if Burns had not kindled at their flame and strung anew his 'wildly sounding rustic lyre with emulating vigour'. Fergusson replaced the collection of English songs which had been his *vade mecum* before the Irvine period and the predominance in this new *vade mecum* of wit and manners-painting over song helped to determine the contents of his *Kilmarnock Poems*. Burns set about doing for his own Ayrshire parish what Fergusson had done for Edinburgh. Whole poems are modelled after the master and everywhere the influence of style and vocabulary is evident.

The other determinant was uglier and more personal. It affected the tone rather than the form and style of the *Kilmarnock Poems*. The dissipation that marked Burns's years after 1775 was at first only 'comparative with the strictness and sobriety of Presbyterian country life'; and it led to no vicious practices till the close of the Irvine period. But, with no solace of rhyme to ease the smart, the failure in Irvine, and then the increasing misery of the home he returned to at Lochlea, were whips that stung Burns to more reckless courses. It was a mood, therefore, far removed from that of song—a devil-may-care, sardonic mood—which possessed Burns, when he discovered Ferguson and returned to rhyme. The poems most completely inspired by it—pieces, like *The Twa Herds* and *Holy Willie's Prayer*, of rollicking (and sometimes coarse) abusive wit—he withheld when it came to printing. But the Postscript of his epistle *To William Simpson*, *The Holy Fair*, *The Address to the Deil*, and provocative stanzas in other poems that he did publish—what Mackenzie calls the 'exceptionable parts' of the *Kilmarnock* volume—show how the mood lingered with Burns, more or less, throughout the years 1784-6, when most of the *Kilmarnock Poems* were either first written or thoroughly revised. What else could be expected? His life at this time was as defiant as his writings. The targets of his abuse and ridicule were now the 'auld licht' clergy and their kirk-sessions—the prime authors of that 'strictness and sobriety' of life, which had fretted the rebel in him from the beginning. His father—whose death in the spring of 1784 had given a final loose to Burns's passions—had not seen eye to eye with them in all things either. And the son saw no reason to give them quarter, when the birth of his 'Betty', and then his complications with Jean Armour, brought him 'point blank within the reach of their heaviest metal'.

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Burns's ambition as a writer, however, did not look at first beyond a Kyle audience for the Kyle he celebrated, and in Ayrshire this note of fiercer rebellion in his book rather helped than hindered its popularity. A book of songs would not have brought him such immediate fame. For in Burns's part of Ayrshire, in the eighteenth century, the tyranny of kirk-sessions and presbyteries and synods over the private lives of individuals had become wellnigh tolerable. Session records swarm with entries that record the comparing of criminals on charges proper only to be dealt with in a civil court in any rightly organized state, they read like nothing so much as a modern police gazette. The *Kilmarnock Poems* voiced a feeling that was inarticulate but aching for utterance. The popularity of Burns with the audience he sought was the popularity of the man with the words for his people.

But it was because Kilmarnock led on to Edinburgh that Burns marked 1786 as his third important year for Edinburgh was a new world to him where he mingled among many classes of men unknown to him before. Yet, though within a fortnight of his arrival the notice taken of him by the noblesse and literati might well have turned his head from the first Burns seems to have felt his Edinburgh welcome as different in motive from his welcome in the west and less to his liking. Edinburgh he found, was more enlightened than the west and indeed rather vain of its enlightenment. Kirk-tyrannies that could agitate Kilmarnock and its neighbourhood bothered the thoughts of this new world very little. A generation of sudden and growing prosperity had given men other interests, and they held it wiser to ignore than to rage against such evils—to let them perish of neglect. It needed Dugald Stewart who knew the map of Burns's poems to procure their recommendation in a periodical that society read and Mackenzie

whispered audibly enough that the wares he praised had been made for another market. Nor was this all. Scott tells in the Account of Edinburgh that he wrote in 1818 for *The Provincial Antiquities of Scotland*, how the prosperity of the later eighteenth century made the New Town, with houses that 'had their ain door' (as the phrase ran then), in contrast to the climbing 'lands' or tenement-houses of the Old Town. This change in the 'domestic establishments' of Edinburgh society naturally produced 'new wants, and a different set of habits'. Burns had not made his book for a city where the old Scottish life and manners were, at best, in a state of thaw. It was not his book so much as his presence that recommended Burns to Edinburgh. Men and women alike were captivated by his personality, and astounded by the wit and strength of mind he displayed in conversation. Any party was sure of success, if the Ayrshire ploughman was one of those invited; and society dined and danced him to its wish. But the poet noticed that, one and all, they advised him to abandon the vernacular for English. He tried the advice, a little. But, for all the 'excellent English scholar' Murdoch had made him as a boy, English books could never make music in his brain like the Fergussons and song-wrights of his own native speech: he lacked observation to translate them in terms of English life; and the half-English life of Edinburgh could not supply the deficiency. To abandon Scots, Burns felt, was to abandon also his Scottish themes—the only themes he knew, or cared, to write upon. In a very few weeks, he grasped the situation. Mrs. Dunlop had written that she feared Edinburgh would lose them 'the Rural Bard produced in Ayrshire'. On 15 January 1787, Burns reassured her: 'The novelty of a poet in my obscure situation, without any of those advantages which are reckoned necessary for that character, at least at this time of day, has raised

a partial tide of public notice which has borne me to a height where I am absolutely feelingly certain my abilities are inadequate to support me and too surely do I see that time when the same tide will leave me and recede perhaps as far below the mark of truth I do not say this in the ridiculous affectation of self abasement and modesty ' And when it was all over and Burns was back in Mauchline, it was the stateliness of the Patricians in Edinburgh ' that he remembered most and not with pleasure He knew and felt himself to be regarded as a novelty—a prodigy—rather than as a poet who had proved his title beyond dispute That is why during the latter months of this Edinburgh period he is found leaving great men's tables to haunt with the Crochallan Fencibles and their like—gay, irresponsible spirits who preserved the life he understood singing songs and telling tales (old world fashion) over their cups in taverns

It was a fortunate result The Edinburgh reception, though not all he could wish was the right medicine for the ailments that had troubled this poet since about 1780 To establish his fame and put real happiness within his reach for the rest of his days the shortest way was to drive him to the Crochallan Fencibles as Edinburgh did For through the Fencibles Burns fell acquainted with James Johnson the music-engraver and learnt of his *Scots Musical Museum* the first volume of which was to appear in May 1787 Johnson's work turned Burns from the ridicule and wit of satire and description which had brought him his renown to modes he had attempted before he spoke out in those kinds He went back to the tunes that were his chief resource and inspiration when poetry first called to him—to the poetical aim and habits of the years when he fashioned *My Nannie O Green grow the Rashes O* and *There was a Lad* At Ellisland and at Dumfries he might be

farmer and gauger for a livelihood. His real work was done for love and without payment—collecting, cleansing, supplementing, refurbishing the ancient songs of his country for the *Museum* (to which he became a sort of unofficial literary editor), and later for George Thomson's *Select Scottish Airs*. Because of the time he gave to these publications, during the rest of his life, very few new pieces were made by him for the several issues of his own works; nor are the pieces he did make very striking, except *Tam o' Shanter*—a happy inspiration, drawn from the same folk sources as gave him material for his songs. But Scott was wrong to 'regret that so much of his time and talents was frittered away in compiling and composing for musical collections'. Character and genius combined in Burns to make this his most proper employ. His genius was, above all, a genius for 'the ring of words': he is greatly original, not in thought, but in style. His character determined this genius towards sources of inspiration in life rather than in books. Burns was too much one of the people to presume ever to 'make verses' like those 'by men who had Greek and Latin', or for that matter any language of literature in the strict sense of the word. Book-inspiration, and attempts to rise from ideas rather than from rhythms and feelings of personal experience, furnish the flat places of his writing. It is when he goes direct to the life of the folk whose 'observation and remark' he courted, and copies the idiom of their daily speech, that he commands the applause he deserves. It was this that saved him from becoming a servile imitator even of Fergusson. Fergusson did not give his style its noticeable drift towards proverb:

'But facts are chiefs that winna ding'—
'The heart aye's the part aye
That makes us right or wrang'—

INTRODUCTION

To make a happy fireside clime
To weans and wife
That s the true pathos and sublime
Of human life

These are the phrases of a folk-artist greater than Fergusson because better read in folk wisdom. And the genius of this man who read folk more greedily than books, plays best of all over those half made (or rather half ruined) things, the folk songs he patched and preserved in his later years, makes him, as Henley has said 'the most exquisite artist in folk-song the world has seen.'

BURNS'S LIFE

1759. Robert Burns born at Alloway, near Ayr, 25 January.
1766. Burns's father, helped by his employer, becomes tenant of Mount Oliphant, a farm near Alloway (May).
1773. Burns makes his first poem (see p. 136 and note).
1775. Spends the summer at a school in Kirkoswald to learn surveying, &c. (see p. 140).
1777. The Burnses move to Lochlea, in Tarbolton (May).
1780. Burns active in founding a Bachelors' Debating Club at Tarbolton (November).
- 1781-2. Resides in Irvine to learn flax-dressing. Meets Richard Brown (see p. 142 and note).
- 1782-3. Reads Fergusson's *Poems* and is excited to emulation.
1783. Begins his first Commonplace Book (April).
1784. His father dies at Lochlea, a poor man (13 February).
With his brother Gilbert, leases Mossiel, near Mauchline, from Gavin Hamilton. Meets Jean Armour at a 'penny dance' in Mauchline (? April 1784).
Birth of Burns's first illegitimate child—'Betty' (November; d. 8 January 1817).
1786. (By April) Burns, who had given Jean Armour a written acknowledgement of marriage, learnt that Jean, at her father's wish, had agreed to the mutilation of his 'paper'.
The parting with 'Highland Mary' (May).
Poems, chiefly in the Scottish Dialect published at Kilmarnock (31 July).
Jean Armour gives birth (3 September) to twins—Robert (d. 14 May 1857) and a daughter (d. in infancy).
Burns arrives in Edinburgh (28 November).
1787. First Edinburgh edition of the *Poems* published (April). Border Tour (5 May-8 June). Returns to Mauchline, where he is made welcome to visit Jean Armour and her family. West Highland Tour (June). Returns to Edinburgh (7 August). Highland Tour with William Nicol (25 August-16 September).
- 1787-8. (September-March) In Edinburgh—except for two brief spells in the country (one in October, at Harvieston, Clackmannanshire, with friends; the other in March, on the Dalswinton estate in Dumfriesshire, choosing a farm)—awaiting a settlement with his publisher, and preparing songs for Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*. Meets Mrs. McLehose (Clarinda; see note on p. 201). Jean Armour gives birth (March) to twin daughters, who lived only a few days.
1788. At home, receiving instructions towards a Commission in the Excise (April-May).
Acknowledges Jean Armour as his wife.
Enters upon his farm at Ellisland (13 June).

- Compeared with Jean Armour before the Kirk Session of Mauchline in order to the solemn confirmation of their irregular marriage (5 August)
- 1787 In Edinburgh seeking an Excise appointment (end of February)
- Birth of Francis Wallace Burns (13 August & 9 July 1803)
- Turned a gauger (by 21 October) having been appointed to the division of which Ellisland was the centre
- 1791 James Earl of Glencairn Burns's patron dies at Falmouth on his way home from Lisbon (January)
- Birth of second illegitimate child—Elizabeth (31 March & 11 June 1873)
- Birth of William Nicol Burns (9 April & 21 February 1872)
- Gives up Ellisland and moves to Dumfries (November) As far back as March 1787 he informed Mrs Dunlop that Ellisland is and will be a very very hard bargain if at all practicable
- 1792 Asked to contribute to George Thomson's *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs* (September)
- Birth of Elizabeth Riddell Burns (21 November & September 1793)
- Visits at Dunlop House Ayrshire (December) Returns to Dumfries shortly before Christmas to find that he had been reported as a person disaffected to government and that the Board of Excise had ordered an inquiry into his political conduct The matter had blown over by 5 January 1793 so far as the Board was concerned But from this time Burns lost more and more the countenance of people of station
- 1793 Second Edinburgh edition of the *Poems* published (February)
- 1794 Last issue of the *Poems* in Burns's lifetime
- Birth of James Glencairn Burns (12 August & 18 November 1865)
- Many songs inspired by Chloris (Jean Lorimer)
- 1795-6 (October-January) Burns seriously ill Jessie Lewars who nursed him succeeds Chloris as the inspiration of his songs
- 1796 Returns to Dumfries from Brow on the Solway where he had been to try sea bathing for a cure and dies (21 July)
- Buried with military honours at Dumfries (25 July) Birth of Maxwell Burns (25 July & 25 April 1799)

HENRY MACKENZIE

Review of the Kilmarnock Edition of
Burns's Poems

The Lounger, No. 97.—December 9, 1786

IN the discovery of talents generally unknown, men are apt to indulge the same fond partiality as in all other discoveries which themselves have made ; and hence we have had repeated instances of painters and of poets, who have been drawn from obscure situations, and held forth to public notice and applause by the extravagant encomiums of their introductors, yet in a short time have sunk again to their former obscurity ; whose merit, though perhaps somewhat neglected, did not appear to have been much undervalued by the world, and could not support, by its own intrinsic excellence, that superior place which the enthusiasm of its patrons would have assigned it.

I know not if I shall be accused of such enthusiasm and partiality, when I introduce to the notice of my readers a poet of our own country, with whose writings I have lately become acquainted ; but if I am not greatly deceived, I think I may safely pronounce him a genius of no ordinary rank. The person to whom I allude is ROBERT BURNS, an Ayrshire ploughman, whose poems were some time ago published in a country-town in the west of Scotland, with no other ambition, it would seem, than to circulate among the inhabitants of the county where he was born, to obtain a little fame from those who had heard of his talents. I hope I shall not be thought to assume too much, if I endeavour to place him in a higher point of view, to call for a verdict of his country on the merit of his works, and to claim for him those honours which their excellence appears to deserve.

In mentioning the circumstance of his humble station, I mean not to rest his pretensions solely on that title, or to

urge the merits of his poetry when considered in relation to the lowness of his birth and the little opportunity of improvement which his education could afford. These particulars indeed might excite our wonder at his productions but his poetry considered abstractedly and without the apologies arising from his situation seems to me fully entitled to command our feelings and to obtain our applause. One bar indeed his birth and education have opposed to his fame the language in which most of his poems are written. Even in Scotland the provincial dialect which Ramsay and he have used is now read with a difficulty which greatly damps the pleasure of the reader. In England it cannot be read at all without such a constant reference to a glossary as nearly to destroy that pleasure.

Some of his productions however, especially those of the grave style are almost English. From one of those I shall first present my readers with an extract, in which I think they will discover a high tone of feeling a power and energy of expression particularly and strongly characteristic of the mind and the voice of a poet. It is from his poem entitled the Vision in which the Genius of his native county, Ayrshire is thus supposed to address him.

(Pages 55-6 lines 91-116)

Of strains like the above solemn and sublime, with that rapt and inspired melancholy in which the Poet lifts his eye above this visible diurnal sphere, the Poems intitled *Despondency* the *Lament Winter a Dirge* and the *Invocation to Ruin* afford no less striking examples. Of the tender and the moral specimens equally advantageous might be drawn from the elegiac verses intitled *Man was made to mourn* from *The Cottar's Saturday Night*, the Stanzas *To a Mouse* or those *To a Mountain Daisy* on turning it down with the plough in April 1786. This last

Poem I shall insert entire, not from its superior merit, but because its length suits the bounds of my Paper.

(Pages 87-9)

I have seldom met with an image more truly pastoral than that of the lark, in the second stanza. Such strokes as these mark the pencil of the poet, which delineates Nature with the precision of intimacy, yet with the delicate colouring of beauty and of taste.

The power of genius is not less admirable in tracing the manners, than in painting the passions, or in drawing the scenery of Nature. That intuitive glance with which a 10 writer like *Shakespeare* discerns the characters of men, with which he catches the many-changing hues of life, forms a sort of problem in the science of mind, of which it is easier to see the truth than to assign the cause. Though I am very far from meaning to compare our rustic bard to *Shakespeare*, yet whoever will read his lighter and more humorous poems, his *Dialogue of the Dogs*, his *Dedication to G—H—, Esq*; his *Epistles to a young Friend*, and to *W. S—n*, will perceive with what uncommon penetration and sagacity this Heaven-taught ploughman, from his humble 20 and unlettered station, has looked upon men and manners.

Against some passages of those last-mentioned poems it has been objected, that they breathe a spirit of libertinism and irreligion. But if we consider the ignorance and fanaticism of the lower class of people in the country where these poems were written, a fanaticism of that pernicious sort which sets *faith* in opposition to *good works*, the fallacy and danger of which, a mind so enlightened as our Poet's could not but perceive; we shall look upon his lighter Muse, not as the enemy of religion, (of which in several places he 30 expresses the justest sentiments), but as the champion of morality, and the friend of virtue.

There are however, it must be allowed some exceptionable parts of the volume he has given to the public, which caution would have suppressed or correction struck out but Poets are seldom cautious and our Poet had alas! no friends or companions from whom correction could be obtained. When we reflect on his rank in life the habits to which he must have been subject and the society in which he must have mixed we regret perhaps more than wonder that delicacy should be so often offended in perusing a volume in which there is so much to interest and to please us

Burns possesses the spirit as well as the fancy of a Poet. That honest pride and independence of soul which are sometimes the Muse's only dower break forth on every occasion in his works. It may be then I shall wrong his feelings while I indulge my own in calling the attention of the public to his situation and circumstances. That condition, humble as it was in which he found content and wooed the Muse might not have been deemed uncomfortable but grief and misfortunes have reached him there and one or two of his poems hint what I have learnt from some of his countrymen that he has been obliged to form the resolution of leaving his native land to seek under a West Indian clime that shelter and support which Scotland has denied him. But I trust means may be found to prevent this resolution from taking place and that I do my country no more than justice, when I suppose her ready to stretch out her hand to cherish and retain this native Poet whose wood notes wild' possess so much excellence. To repair the wrongs of suffering or neglected merit to call forth genius from the obscurity in which it had pined indignant, and place it where it may profit or delight the world, these are exertions which give to wealth an enviable superiority to greatness and to patronage a laudable pride

DUGALD STEWART

Burns in 1786-7

Currie's edition of *The Works of Robert Burns*, 1800

THE first time I saw Robert Burns, was on 23d of October 1786, when he dined at my house in Ayrshire. . . .

His manners were then, as they continued ever afterwards, simple, manly, and independent ; strongly expressive of conscious genius and worth ; but without anything that indicated forwardness, arrogance, or vanity. He took his share in conversation, but not more than belonged to him ; and listened with apparent attention and deference, on subjects where his want of education deprived him of the means of information. If there had been a little more of gentleness 10 and accommodation in his temper, he would, I think, have been still more interesting ; but he had been accustomed to give law in the circle of his ordinary acquaintance, and his dread of anything approaching to meanness or servility, rendered his manner somewhat decided and hard.—Nothing perhaps was more remarkable among his various attainments, than the fluency, and precision, and originality of his language, when he spoke in company ; more particularly as he aimed at purity in his turn of expression, and avoided more successfully than most Scotchmen, the peculiarities of 20 Scottish phraseology.

He came to Edinburgh early in the winter following, and remained there for several months. . . .

The attentions he received during his stay in town from all ranks and descriptions of persons, were such as would have turned any head but his own. I cannot say that I could perceive any unfavourable effect which they left on his mind. He retained the same simplicity of manners and appearance which had struck me so forcibly when I first

saw him in the country nor did he seem to feel any additional self importance from the number and rank of his new acquaintance His dress was perfectly suited to his station, plain and unpretending with a sufficient attention to neatness If I recollect right he always wore boots, and when on more than usual ceremony buck-skin breeches

The variety of his engagements while in Edinburgh prevented me from seeing him so often as I could have wished In the course of the spring he called on me once or twice
 10 at my request early in the morning and walked with me to Braid Hills in the neighbourhood of the town, when he charmed me still more by his private conversation than he had ever done in company He was passionately fond of the beauties of nature and I recollect once he told me when I was admiring a distant prospect in one of our morning walks that the sight of so many smoking cottages gave a pleasure to his mind which none could understand who had not witnessed like himself the happiness and the worth which they contained

20 The idea which his conversation conveyed of the powers of his mind exceeded if possible that which is suggested by his writings Among the poets whom I have happened to know I have been struck in more than one instance with the unaccountable disparity between their general talents and the occasional inspirations of their more favoured moments But all the faculties of Burns's mind were as far as I could judge equally vigorous, and his predilection for poetry was rather the result of his own enthusiastic and impassioned temper than of a genius
 30 exclusively adapted to that species of composition From his conversation I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities

Among the subjects on which he was accustomed to dwell, the characters of the individuals with whom he happened to meet was plainly a favourite one. The remarks he made on them were always shrewd and pointed, though frequently inclining too much to sarcasm. His praise of those he loved was sometimes indiscriminate and extravagant ; but this, I suspect, proceeded rather from the caprice and humour of the moment, than from the effects of attachment in blinding his judgment. His wit was ready, and always impressed with the marks of a vigorous understanding ; but, to my 10 taste, not often pleasing or happy. His attempts at epigram in his printed works, are the only performances perhaps, that he has produced, totally unworthy of his genius.

SIR WALTER SCOTT

Recollections of Burns

Lockhart's *Life of Robert Burns*, 1828

As for Burns, I may truly say, *Virgilium vidi tantum*. I was a lad of fifteen in 1786-7, when he came first to Edinburgh, but had sense and feeling enough to be much interested in his poetry, and would have given the world to know him ; but I had very little acquaintance with any literary people, and still less with the gentry of the west country, the two sets that he most frequented. . . . As it 20 was, I saw him one day at the late venerable Professor Ferguson's, where there were several gentlemen of literary reputation, among whom I remember the celebrated Mr. Dugald Stewart. Of course we youngsters sate silent, looked, and listened. The only thing I remember which was remarkable in Burns's manner, was the effect produced upon him by a print of Bunbury's, representing a soldier lying dead on the snow, his dog sitting in misery on one

side —on the other his widow with a child in her arms
These lines were written beneath —

Cold on Canadian hills or Minden's plain
Perhaps that parent wept her soldier slain—
Bent o'er her babe her eye dissolved in dew
The big drops mingling with the milk he drew
Gave the sad presage of his future years
The child of misery baptized in tears

Burns seemed much affected by the print or rather the
10 ideas which it suggested to his mind. He actually shed
tears. He asked whose the lines were and it chanced that
nobody but myself remembered that they occur in a half
forgotten poem of Langhorne's called by the unpromising
title *The Justice of Peace*. I whispered my information to
a friend present who mentioned it to Burns who rewarded
me with a look and a word which though of mere civility
I then received and still recollect with very great pleasure.

His person was strong and robust his manners rustic,
not clownish a sort of dignified plainness and simplicity
20 which received part of its effect perhaps from one's know-
ledge of his extraordinary talents. His features are repre-
sented in Mr Nasmyth's picture but to me it conveys the
idea that they are diminished as if seen in perspective.
I think his countenance was more massive than it looks in
any of the portraits. I would have taken the poet, had
I not known what he was for a very sagacious country
farmer of the old Scotch school, i.e. none of your modern
agriculturists who keep labourers for their drudgery, but
the *douce gude-man* who held his own plough. There was
30 a strong expression of sense and shrewdness in all his line-
aments the eye alone I think indicated the poetical
character and temperament. It was large and of a dark
cast which glowed (I say literally *glowed*) when he spoke
with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in
a human head though I have seen the most distinguished

men of my time. His conversation expressed perfect self-confidence, without the slightest presumption. Among the men who were the most learned of their time and country, he expressed himself with perfect firmness, but without the least intrusive forwardness; and when he differed in opinion, he did not hesitate to express it firmly, yet at the same time with modesty. I do not remember any part of his conversation distinctly enough to be quoted, nor did I ever see him again, except in the street, where he did not recognize me, as I could not expect he should. . . . 10

I remember on this occasion I mention, I thought Burns's acquaintance with English Poetry was rather limited, and also, that having twenty times the abilities of Allan Ramsay and of Fergusson, he talked of them with too much humility, as his models; there was, doubtless, national predilection in his estimate.

This is all I can tell you about Burns. I have only to add that his dress corresponded with his manner. He was like a farmer dressed in his best to dine with the Laird. I do not speak *in malam partem*, when I say, I never saw a man 20 in company with his superiors in station and information, more perfectly free from either the reality or the affectation of embarrassment. I was told, but did not observe it, that his address to females was extremely deferential, and always with a turn either to the pathetic or humorous, which engaged their attention particularly. I have heard the late Duchess of Gordon remark this. . . .

FRANCIS JEFFREY

From the Review of Cromeek's *Reliques*
of Robert Burns

The Edinburgh Review January 1809

WE can see no propriety in regarding the poetry of Burns chiefly as the wonderful work of a peasant and thus admiring it much in the same way as if it had been written with his toes yet there are peculiarities in his works which remind us of the lowness of his origin and faults for which the defects of his education afford an obvious cause if not a legitimate apology In forming a correct estimate of these works it is necessary to take into account those peculiarities

- 10 The first is the undisciplined harshness and acrimony of his invective The great boast of polished life is the delicacy, and even the generosity of its hostility—that quality which is still the characteristic as it furnishes the denomination of a gentleman—that principle which forbids us to attack the defenceless to strike the fallen or to mangle the slain—and enjoins us in forging the shafts of satire to increase the polish exactly as we add to their keenness or their weight For this as well as for other things we are indebted to chivalry and of this Burns had none His whole raillery
20 consists in railing and his satirical vein displays itself chiefly in calling names and in swearing We say this mainly with a reference to his personalities In many of his more general representations of life and manners there is no doubt much that may be called satirical mixed up with admirable humour and description of immutable vivacity

There is a similar want of polish or at least of respectfulness in the general tone of his gallantry He has written with more passion perhaps and more variety of natural

feeling, on the subject of love, than any other poet whatever—but with a fervour that is sometimes indelicate, and seldom accommodated to the timidity and ‘sweet austere composure’ of women of refinement. He has expressed admirably the feelings of an enamoured peasant, who, however refined or eloquent he may be, always approaches his mistress on a footing of equality; but has never caught that tone of chivalrous gallantry which uniformly abases itself in the presence of the object of its devotion. . . .

But the leading vice in Burns’s character, and the cardinal 10 deformity, indeed, of all his productions, was his contempt, or affectation of contempt, for prudence, decency, and regularity; and his admiration of thoughtlessness, oddity, and vehement sensibility;—his belief, in short, in the *dispensing power* of genius and social feeling, in all matters of morality and common sense. . . .

It is humiliating to think how deeply Burns has fallen into this debasing error. He is perpetually making a parade of his thoughtlessness, inflammability, and imprudence, and talking with much complacency and exultation of the 20 offence he has occasioned to the sober and correct part of mankind. This odious slang infects almost all his prose, and a very great proportion of his poetry; and is, we are persuaded, the chief, if not the only source of the disgust with which, in spite of his genius, we know that he is regarded by many very competent and liberal judges. His apology, too, we are willing to believe, is to be found in the original lowness of his situation, and the slightness of his acquaintance with the world. With his talents and power of observation, he could not have seen *much* of the beings 30 who echoed this raving, without feeling for them that distrust and contempt which would have made him blush to think he had ever stretched over them the protecting shield of his genius.

Alas to this most lamentable trait of vulgarity, and indeed in some measure arising out of it is that perpetual boast of his own independence which is obtruded upon the readers of Burns in almost every page of his writings. The sentiment itself is noble and it is often finely expressed, — but a gentleman would only have expressed it when he was insulted or provoked and would never have made it a spontaneous theme to those friends in whose estimation he felt that his honour stood clear. It is mixed up too, in
 10 Burns with too fierce a tone of defiance, and indicates rather the pride of a sturdy peasant, than the calm and natural elevation of a generous mind.

The last of the symptoms of rusticity which we think it necessary to notice in the works of this extraordinary man, is that frequent mistake of mere exaggeration and violence, for force and sublimity which has defaced so much of his prose composition and given an air of heaviness and labour to a good deal of his serious poetry. The truth is that his *forte* was in humour and in pathos—or rather in tenderness
 15 of feeling and that he has very seldom succeeded either where mere wit and sprightliness or where great energy and weight of sentiment were requisite. He had evidently a very false and crude notion of what constituted *strength* of writing and instead of that simple and brief directness which stamps the character of vigour upon every syllable has generally had recourse to a mere accumulation of hyperbolic expressions which encumber the diction instead of
 20 *evincing it and show the determination to be impressive* without the power of executing it. This error also we are
 30 inclined to ascribe entirely to the defects of his education. The value of simplicity in the expression of passion, is a lesson we believe of nature and of genius—but its importance in mere grave and impressive writing is one of the latest discoveries of rhetorical experience.

With the allowances and exceptions we have now stated, we think Burns entitled to the rank of a great and original genius. He has in all his compositions great force of conception ; and great spirit and animation in its expression. He has taken a large range through the region of Fancy, and naturalized himself in almost all her climates. He has great humour—great powers of description—great pathos—and great discrimination of character. Almost everything that he says has spirit and originality ; and everything that he says well, is characterized by a charming facility, which 10 gives a grace even to occasional rudeness, and communicates to the reader a delightful sympathy with the spontaneous soaring and conscious inspiration of the poet.

Considering the reception which these works have met with from the public, and the long period during which the greater part of them have been in their possession, it may appear superfluous to say anything as to their characteristic or peculiar merit. Though the ultimate judgment of the public, however, be always sound, or at least decisive as to its general result, it is not always very apparent upon 20 what grounds it has proceeded ; nor in consequence of what, or in spite of what, it has been obtained. In Burns's works there is much to censure, as well as much to praise ; and as time has not yet separated his ore from its dross, it may be worth while to state, in a very general way, what we presume to anticipate as the result of this separation. Without pretending to enter at all into the comparative merit of particular passages, we may venture to lay it down as our opinion—that his poetry is far superior to his prose ; that his Scottish compositions are greatly to be preferred to 30 his English ones ; and that his Songs will probably outlive all his other productions. . . .

The prose works of Burns consist almost entirely of his letters. They bear, as well as his poetry, the seal and the

impress of his genius but they contain much more bad taste and are written with far more apparent labour His poetry was almost all written primarily from feeling and only secondarily from ambition His letters seem to have been nearly all composed as exercises and for display There are few of them written with simplicity or plainness, and though natural enough as to the sentiment they are generally very strained and elaborate in the expression A very great proportion of them too relate neither to facts
 1 nor feelings peculiarly connected with the author or his correspondent—but are made up of general declamation moral reflections and vague discussions—all evidently composed for the sake of effect and frequently introduced with long complaints of having nothing to say and of the necessity and difficulty of letter writing

By far the best of those compositions are such as we should consider as exceptions from this general character—such as contain some specific information as to himself or are suggested by events or observations directly applicable
 11 to his correspondent One of the best perhaps is that addressed to Dr Moore containing an account of his early life of which Dr Currie has made such a judicious use in his Biography It is written with great clearness and characteristic effect and contains many touches of easy humour and natural eloquence We are struck, as we open the book accidentally with the following original application of a classical image by this unlettered rustic Talking of the first vague aspirations of his own gigantic mind he says—we think very finely — I had felt some early stirrings
 10 of ambition, but they were the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclop round the walls of his cave! Of his other letters those addressed to Mrs Dunlop are in our opinion by far the best

Before proceeding to take any particular notice of his

poetical compositions, we must take leave to apprise our Southern readers, that all his best pieces are written in Scotch ; and that it is impossible for them to form any adequate judgment of their merits, without a pretty long residence among those who still use that language. To be able to translate the words, is but a small part of the knowledge that is necessary. The whole genius and idiom of the language must be familiar ; and the characters, and habits, and associations of those who speak it. We beg leave, too, in passing, to observe, that this Scotch is not to be con- 10 sidered as a provincial dialect—the vehicle only of rustic vulgarity and rude local humour. It is the language of a whole country—long an independent kingdom, and still separate in laws, character, and manners. It is by no means peculiar to the vulgar ; but is the common speech of the whole nation in early life—and, with many of its most exalted and accomplished individuals, throughout their whole existence ; and, though it be true that, in later times, it has been, in some measure, laid aside by the more ambitious and aspiring of the present generation, it is still 20 recollected, even by them, as the familiar language of their childhood, and of those who were the earliest objects of their love and veneration. It is connected, in their imagination, not only with that olden time which is uniformly conceived as more pure, lofty, and simple than the present, but also with all the soft and bright colours of remembered childhood and domestic affection. All its phrases conjure up images of schoolday innocence, and sports, and friendships which have no pattern in succeeding years. Add to all this, that it is the language of a great body of poetry, 30 with which almost all Scotchmen are familiar ; and, in particular, of a great multitude of songs, written with more tenderness, nature, and feeling, than any other lyric compositions that are extant—and we may perhaps be allowed

to say that the Scotch is in reality, a highly poetical language and that it is an ignorant, as well as an illiberal prejudice which would seek to confound it with the barbarous dialects of Yorkshire or Devon. In composing his Scottish poems therefore Burns did not merely make an instinctive and necessary use of the only dialect he could employ. He wrote in Scotch because the writings which he most aspired to imitate were composed in that language and it is evident from the variations preserved by Dr
 10 Currie that he took much greater pains with the beauty and purity of his expressions in Scotch than in English and every one who understands both, must admit with infinitely better success

JOHN GIBSON LOCKHART

From the *Life of Robert Burns*, 1828

THE moral influence of his genius has not been confined to his own countrymen. The range of the *pastoral*, said Johnson is narrow. Poetry cannot dwell upon the minuter distinctions by which one species differs from another, without departing from that simplicity of grandeur which fills the imagination nor dissect the latent qualities of things
 20 without losing its general power of gratifying every mind by recalling its own conceptions. Not only the images of rural life but the occasions on which they can be properly applied are few and general. The state of a man confined to the employments and pleasures of the country, is so little diversified and exposed to so few of those accidents which produce perplexities terrors and surprises in more complicated transactions that he can be shown but seldom in such circumstances as attract curiosity. His ambition is without policy and his love without intrigue. He has no
 30 complaints to make of his rival but that he is richer than

himself ; nor any disasters to lament, but a cruel mistress or a bad harvest.' Such were the notions of the great arbiter of taste, whose dicta formed the creed of the British world, at the time when Burns made his appearance to overturn all such dogmata at a single blow ; to convince the loftiest of the noble, and the daintiest of the learned, that wherever human nature is at work, the eye of a poet may discover rich elements of his art—that over Christian Europe, at all events, the purity of sentiment, and the fervour of passion, may be found combined with sagacity 10 of intellect, wit, shrewdness, humour, whatever elevates, and whatever delights the mind, not more easily amidst the most 'complicated transactions' of the most polished societies, than

In huts where poor men lie.

Burns did not place himself only within the estimation and admiration of those whom the world called his superiors—a solitary tree emerging into light and air, and leaving the parent underwood as low and as dark as before. He, as well as any man,

20

Knew his own worth, and revered the lyre :

but he ever announced himself as a peasant, the representative of his class, the painter of their manners, inspired by the same influences which ruled their bosoms ; and who-soever sympathised with the verse of Burns, had his soul opened for the moment to the whole family of man. If, in too many instances, the matter has stopped there—the blame is not with the poet, but with the mad and unconquerable pride and coldness of the worldly heart—' man's inhumanity to man '.

30

As to Burns's want of education and knowledge, Mr. Campbell may not have considered, but he must admit, that whatever Burns's opportunities had been at the time

when he produced his first poems such a man as he was not likely to be a hard reader (which he certainly was) and a constant observer of men and manners in a much wider circle of society than almost any other great poet has ever moved in from three and twenty to eight-and thirty, without having thoroughly removed any pretext for auguring unfavourably on that score of what he might have been expected to produce in the more elaborate departments of his art had his life been spared to the usual limits of humanity. In another way however I cannot help suspecting that Burns's enlarged knowledge both of men and books, produced an unfavourable effect rather than otherwise on the exertions such as they were of his later years. His generous spirit was open to the impression of every kind of excellence his lively imagination lending its own vigour to whatever it touched made him admire even what other people try to read in vain and after travelling as he did over the general surface of our literature he appears to have been somewhat startled at the consideration of what he himself had in comparative ignorance ventured and to have been more intimidated than encouraged by the retrospect. In most of the new departments in which he made some trial of his strength (such, for example as the moral epistle in Pope's vein the heroic satire &c.) he appears to have soon lost heart, and paused. There is indeed one magnificent exception in *Tam o' Shanter*—a piece which no one can understand without believing that had Burns pursued that walk and poured out his stores of traditionary lore embellished with his extraordinary powers of description of all kinds we might have had from his hand a series of national tales uniting the quaint simplicity, sly humour and irresistible pathos of another Chaucer with the strong and graceful versification and masculine wit and sense of another Dryden.

THOMAS CARLYLE

From the Review of Lockhart's *Life*
of *Robert Burns*

The Edinburgh Review, December 1828

WE recollect no poet of Burns's susceptibility who comes before us from the first, and abides with us to the last, with such a total want of affectation. He is an honest man, and an honest writer. In his successes and his failures, in his greatness and his littleness, he is ever clear, simple, true, and glitters with no lustre but his own. We reckon this to be a great virtue ; to be, in fact, the root of most other virtues, literary as well as moral.

Here, however, let us say, it is to the poetry of Burns that we now allude ; to those writings which he had time ¹⁰ to meditate, and where no special reason existed to warp his critical feeling, or obstruct his endeavour to fulfil it. Certain of his Letters, and other fractions of prose composition, by no means deserve this praise. Here, doubtless, there is not the same natural truth of style ; but on the contrary, something not only stiff, but strained and twisted ; a certain high-flown inflated tone ; the stilting emphasis of which contrasts ill with the firmness and rugged simplicity of even his poorest verses. Thus no man, it would appear, is altogether unaffected. Does not Shakespeare himself ²⁰ sometimes premeditate the sheerest bombast ! But even with regard to these Letters of Burns, it is but fair to state that he had two excuses. The first was his comparative deficiency in language. Burns, though for most part he writes with singular force and even gracefulness, is not master of English prose, as he is of Scottish verse ; not master of it, we mean, in proportion to the depth and vehemence of his matter. These Letters strike us as the

effort of a man to express something which he has no organ fit for expressing. But a second and weightier excuse is to be found in the peculiarity of Burns's social rank. His correspondents are often men whose relation to him he has never accurately ascertained whom therefore he is either forearming himself against or else unconsciously flattering by adopting the style he thinks will please them. At all events we should remember that these faults, even in his Letters are not the rule but the exception. Whenever he
 10 writes as one would ever wish to do to trusted friends and on real interests his style becomes simple vigorous expressive sometimes even beautiful. His letters to Mrs Dunlop are uniformly excellent.

Independently of the essential gift of poetic feeling a certain rugged sterling worth pervades whatever Burns has written a virtue as of green fields and mountain breezes dwells in his poetry it is redolent of natural life and hardy natural men. There is a decisive strength in him and yet a sweet native gracefulness he is tender he is
 20 vehement yet without constraint or too visible effort, he melts the heart or inflames it, with a power which seems habitual and familiar to him. We see that in this man there was the gentleness the trembling pity of a woman with the deep earnestness the force and passionate ardour of a hero. Tears lie in him and consuming fire, as lightning lurks in the drops of the summer cloud. He has a resonance in his bosom for every note of human feeling the high and the low, the sad the ludicrous the joyful are welcome in their turns to his lightly moved and ill-conceiving spirit. And
 30 observe with what a fierce prompt force he grasps his subject be it what it may! How he fixes as it were the full image of the matter in his eye full and clear in every lineament and catches the real type and essence of it,

amid a thousand accidents and superficial circumstances, no one of which misleads him ! Is it of reason ; some truth to be discovered ? No sophistry, no vain surface-logic detains him ; quick, resolute, unerring, he pierces through into the marrow of the question ; and speaks his verdict with an emphasis that cannot be forgotten. Is it of description ; some visual object to be represented ? No poet of any age or nation is more graphic than Burns : the characteristic features disclose themselves to him at a glance ; three lines from his hand and we have a likeness. And, in 10 that rough dialect, in that rude, often awkward metre, so clear and definite a likeness ! It seems a draughtsman working with a burnt stick ; and yet the burin of a Retzsch is not more expressive or exact.

Independently of the clear, manly, heartfelt sentiment that ever pervades *his* poetry, his Songs are honest in another point of view : in form, as well as in spirit. They do not *affect* to be set to music, but they actually and in themselves are music ; they have received their life, and fashioned themselves together, in the medium of Harmony, 20 as Venus rose from the bosom of the sea. The story, the feeling, is not detailed, but suggested ; not *said*, or spouted, in rhetorical completeness and coherence ; but *sung*, in fitful gushes, in glowing hints, in fantastic breaks, in *warblings* not of the voice only, but of the whole mind. We consider this to be the essence of a song ; and that no songs since the little careless snatches, and as it were drops of song, which Shakespeare has here and there sprinkled over his Plays, fulfil this condition in nearly the same degree as most of Burns's do. Such grace and truth of external movement, 30 too, presupposes in general a corresponding force and truth of sentiment and inward meaning. The Songs of Burns are not more perfect in the former quality than in the latter.

With what tenderness he sings yet with what vehemence and entireness ! There is a piercing wail in his sorrow the purest rapture in his joy he burns with the sternest ire or laughs with the loudest or slyest mirth, and yet he is sweet and soft sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet and soft as their parting tear If we farther take into account the immense variety of his subjects how, from the flowing revel in *Willie brew'd a Peck o' Maunt* to the still rapt enthusiasm of sadness for *Mary in Heaven* from the
 10 glad kind greeting of *Auld Langsyne* or the comic archness of *Duncan Gray* to the fire-eyed fury of *Scots wha hae us* *Il allace bled* he has found a tone and words for every mood of man's heart—it will seem a small praise if we rank him as the first of all our Song writers for we know not where to find one worthy of being second to him

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

From Some Aspects of Robert Burns'

The Cornhill Magazine October 1879

(By permission of John Murray)

WHAT he had gained from his predecessors was a direct speaking style and to walk on his own feet instead of on academical stilts There was never a man of letters with more absolute command of his means and we may say of
 20 him without excess that his style was his slave Hence that energy of epithet, so concise and telling that a foreigner is tempted to explain it by some special richness or aptitude in the dialect he wrote Hence that Homeric justice and completeness of description which gives us the very physiognomy of nature in body and detail as nature is Hence too the unbroken literary quality of his best pieces which keeps him from any slip into the weariful trade of word-painting and presents everything as everything should be

presented by the art of words, in a clear, continuous medium of thought. Principal Shairp, for instance, gives us a paraphrase of one tough verse of the original; and for those who know the Greek poets only by paraphrase, this has the very quality they are accustomed to look for and admire in Greek. The contemporaries of Burns were surprised that he should visit so many celebrated mountains and waterfalls, and not seize the opportunity to make a poem. Indeed, it is not for those who have a true command of the art of words, but for peddling, professional amateurs, that these 10 pointed occasions are most useful and inspiring. As those who speak French imperfectly are glad to dwell on any topic they may have talked upon or heard others talk upon before, because they know appropriate words for it in French, so the dabbler in verse rejoices to behold a waterfall, because he has learned the sentiment and knows appropriate words for it in poetry. But the dialect of Burns was fitted to deal with any subject; and whether it was a stormy night, a shepherd's collie, a sheep struggling in the snow, the conduct of cowardly soldiers in the field, the gait 20 and cogitations of a drunken man, or only a village cock-crow in the morning, he could find language to give it freshness, body, and relief. He was always ready to borrow the hint of a design, as though he had a difficulty in commencing—a difficulty, let us say, in choosing a subject out of a world which seemed all equally living and significant to him; but once he had the subject chosen, he could cope with nature single-handed, and make every stroke a triumph. Again, his absolute mastery in his art enabled him to express each and all of his different humours, and 30 to pass smoothly and congruously from one to another. Many men invent a dialect for only one side of their nature—perhaps their pathos or their humour, or the delicacy of their senses—and, for lack of a medium, leave all the others

unexpressed. You meet such a one, and find him in conversation full of thought, feeling and experience which he has lacked the art to employ in his writings. But Burns was not thus hampered in the practice of the literary art, he could throw the whole weight of his nature into his work and impregnate it from end to end. If Doctor Johnson that stilted and accomplished stylist had lacked the sacred Boswell what should we have known of him? and how should we have delighted in his acquaintance as we do?

¹⁰ Those who spoke with Burns tell us how much we have lost who did not. But I think they exaggerate their privilege. I think we have the whole Burns in our possession set forth in his consummate verses.

It was by his style and not by his matter, that he affected Wordsworth and the world. There is indeed only one merit worth considering in a man of letters—that he should write well and only one damning fault—that he should write ill. We are little the better for the reflections of the sailor's parrot in the story. And so if Burns helped to

²⁰ change the course of literary history it was by his frank direct and masterly utterance and not by his homely choice of subjects. That was imposed upon him not chosen upon a principle. He wrote from his own experience, because it was his nature so to do and the tradition of the school from which he proceeded was fortunately not opposed to homely subjects. But to these homely subjects he communicated the rich commentary of his nature they were all steeped in Burns and they interest us not in themselves but because they have been passed through the spirit of so

³⁰ genuine and vigorous a man. Such is the stamp of living literature and there never was any more alive than that of Burns.

W. E. HENLEY

From ' Burns. Life, Genius, Achievement '

The Poetry of Robert Burns, edited by W. E. Henley
and T. F. Henderson, vol. iv, 1897

(By permission of Messrs. Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd.)

HE was the last of a school. It culminated in him, because he had more genius, and genius of a finer, a rarer, and a more generous quality, than all his immediate ancestors put together. But he cannot fairly be said to have contributed anything to it except himself. He invented none of its forms ; its spirit was not of his originating ; its ideals and standards of perfection were discovered, and partly realised, by other men ; and he had a certain timidity, as it were a *fainéantise*, in conception—a kind of unreadiness in initiative—which makes him more largely 10 dependent upon his exemplars than any great poet has ever been. Not only does he take whatever the Vernacular School can give in such matters as tone, sentiment, method, diction, phrase ; but also, he is content to run in debt to it for suggestions as regards ideas and for models in style. Hamilton of Gilbertfield and Allan Ramsay conventionalise the Rhymed Epistle ; and he accepts the convention as it left their hands, and produces epistles in rhyme which are glorified Hamilton-Ramsay. Fergusson writes *Caller Water*, and *Leith Races*, and *The Farmer's Ingle*, and *Planestanes* 20 and *Causey*, and the *Ode to the Gowdspink* ; and he follows suit with *Scotch Drink*, and the *Saturday Night*, and *The Holy Fair*, and *The Brigs of Ayr*, and the *Mouse* and the *Mountain Daisy*. Sempill of Beltrees starts a tradition with *The Piper of Kilbarchan* ; and his effect is plain in the elegies on Tam Samson and Poor Mailie. Ramsay sees a Vision, and tinkers old, indecent songs, and writes comic

tales in glib octo syllabics, and instinctively and naturally Burns does all three. It is as though some touch of rivalry were needed to put him on his mettle—as though instead of writing and caring for himself alone—(as Keats and Byron did and Shelley new men all and founders of dynasties not final expressions of sovereignty)—to be himself he must still be emulous of some one else. This is not written as a reproach—it is stated as a fact. On the strength of that fact one cannot choose but abate the old

10 fantastic estimate of Burns's originality. But originality (to which by the way he laid no claim) is but one element in the intricately formed and subtly ordered plexus which is called genius—and I do not know that we need think any the less of Burns for that it is not predominant in him. Original or not he had the Vernacular and its methods at

his fingers' ends. He wrote the heroic couplet (on the Dryden Pope convention) clumsily and without the faintest idea of what it had been in Marlowe's hands, without the

20 dimmest foreshadowing of what it was presently to be in Keats's—he had no skill in what is called 'blank verse'—by which I mean the metre in which Shakespeare triumphed and Milton after Shakespeare and Thomson and Cowper each according to his lights after Shakespeare and Milton, he was a kind of hob-nailed Gray in his use of choric strophes and in his apprehension of the ode. But he entered into the possession of such artful and difficult stanzas as that of

Montgomerie's *Banks of Helicon* and his own favourite sextain as an heir upon the ownership of an estate which he has known in all its details since he could know anything

30 It was fortunate for him and for his book as it was fortunate for the world at large—as too it was afterwards to be fortunate for Scots song—that he was thus imitative in kind and thus traditional in practice. He had the sole ear of the Vernacular Muse—there was not a tool in her budget of

which he was not master ; and he took his place, the moment he moved for it, not so much, perhaps, by reason of his uncommon capacity as, because he discovered himself to his public in the very terms—of diction, form, style, sentiment even—with which that public was familiar from of old, and in which it was waiting and longing to be addressed.

.
I have said that he contributed nothing to Vernacular Poetry except himself, but, his contribution apart, was purely Scots-Traditional ; and this is especially true of his 10 treatment of the Vernacular Song. What he found ready to his hand was, in brief, his country's lyric life. Scotland had had singers before him ; and they, nameless now and forgotten save as factors in the sum of his achievement, had sung of life and the experiences of life, the tragedy of death and defeat, the farce and the romance of sex, the rapture and the fun of battle and drink, with sincerity always, and often, very often, with rich or rich-rank humour. Among them they had observed and realised a little world of circumstance and character ; among them they had developed 20 the folk-song, had fixed its type, had cast it into the rhythms which best fitted its aspirations, had equipped it with all manner of situations and refrains, and, above all, had possessed it of a great number of true and taking lyrical ideas. Any one who has tried to write a song will agree with me, when I say that a lyrical idea—by which I mean a rhythm, a burden, and a drift—once found, the song writes itself. It writes itself easily or with difficulty, it writes itself well or ill ; but in the end it writes itself. In this matter of lyrical ideas Burns was fortunate beyond any 30 of Apollo's sons. He had no need to quest for them : there they lay ready to his hand, and he had but to work his will with them. That they were there explains the wonderful

variety of his humours his effects and his themes that he could live and work up to so many among them is proof positive and enduring of the apprehensiveness of his humanity his gift of right far-ranging sympathy. It is certain that had he not been they had long since passed out of practical life into the Chelsea Hospital of some antiquarian publication. But it is also certain that had they not been there for him to take and despoil and use he would not have been—he could not have been—the master lyricist we know. What he found was of quite extraordinary worth to him what he added was himself and his addition made the life of his find perennial. But, much as are the touch of genius and the stamp of art they are not everything. The best of many nameless singers lives in Burns's songs, but that Burns lives so intense a lyric life is largely due to the fact that he took to himself and made his own the lyrical experience the lyrical longing the lyrical invention the lyrical possibilities of many nameless singers. He was the last and the greatest of them all but he could not so have been the greatest by so very much as he seems had these innominates not been nor could his songs have been so far wandered as they are nor so long lived as they must be had these innominates not lived their lyric life before him. In other terms, the atmosphere, the style, the tone the realistic method and design with much of the material and the humanity of Burns's songs are inherited. Again and again his forefathers find him in lyrical ideas in whose absence there must certainly—there cannot but have been—a blank in his work. They are his best models and he does not always surpass them as he is sometimes not even their equal. And if his effect along certain lines and in certain specified directions be so intense and enduring as it is the reason is that they are a hundred strong behind him and that he has selected from each and all of them that

which was lyrical and incorruptible. A peasant like themselves, he knew them as none else could ever know. He sympathised from within with their ambitions, their fancies, their ideals, their derisions, even as he was master, and something more, of their methods. And, while it is fair to say that what is best in them is sublimated and glorified by him, it is also fair to say that, but for them, he could never have approved himself the most exquisite artist in folk-song the world has seen.

Sir Walter Raleigh

From 'An Essay on Robert Burns' prefixed to Lockhart's
Life of Burns 1914

(By permission of Lady Raleigh and Messrs. Henry Young & Sons, Ltd.)

It is not the men of letters who have handled Burns with 10
the surest touch. Men to whom letters mean little or nothing
are quicker to understand him. The fact is that Burns is
everyman. There is no subtlety, and no curiosity, in all his
writings. His ditties are in the major key. The feelings
which he celebrates are feelings familiar to all, even to those
who, in mere self-protection, deny that they feel them.
There is no escape from him. He blurts out what everyone
is thinking, even though most of his hearers are trying not
to think it. But all their careful internal discipline is use-
less, and is even made to appear mean, when their furtive 20
thoughts are dragged into the light, and are invested with
the splendour of courageous and absolute expression. Burns
has often been praised for his independence of temper. He
cannot be over-praised ; born as he was into a society of
people struggling for a livelihood, and inured to timidities
and suppressions, it was only by his enormous gift of courage
and candour that he cut himself loose from these bonds, and
rose into the freedom of the truth. His magnanimous reck-
lessness speeded him on his way to death, but it was the

same quality of his mind which in the beginning had lifted him into the light and delivered him from slavery. He owed a death to the God of whom music and song and blood are pure. he paid his debt early but he was no loser by the bargain.

This wonderful instinct for truth and frankness is the secret of his genius and of his style. Perhaps it is the secret of all great style. Most men take no interest in the truth save in relation to their circumstances, their needs and to their aims. When they try to express themselves they weave a network of accommodations, and entangle themselves in it. Their only blunt, direct, and lucid statements are expressions of the will not of the understanding. What they see as disinterested spectators does not prompt them to speech. But here and there at rare intervals a man is born who must say what he sees for no other reason than that he sees it and on him the gift of speech descends.

Selections from
ROBERT BURNS'S
POETRY and PROSE

Mary Morison

Written 1732-4 — Published Works (ed. Currie) 1800

O MARY at thy window be
 It is the wish'd the trysted hour !
 Those smiles and glances let me see
 That make the miser's treasure poor
 How blythely wad I bide the stoure
 A weary slave frae sun to sun
 Could I the rich reward secure
 The lovely Mary Morison

Yestreen when to the trembling string
 The dance gaed thro' the lighted ha', 10
 To thee my fancy took its wing
 I sat but neither heard or saw
 Tho' this was fair and that was braw
 And yon the toast of a' the town
 I sigh'd and said among them a
 Ye are na Mary Morison

O Mary canst thou wreck his peace
 Wha for thy sake wad gladly die ?
 Or canst thou break that heart of his
 Whase only faut is loving thee ? 20
 If love for love thou wilt na gie
 At least be pity to me shown !
 A thought ungentle canna be
 The thought o' Mary Morison

stoure] dust turmoil braw] richly dressed

M y N a n n i e O

Written 1782-4 —Published *Poems* (Edinburgh), 1787

BEHIND yon hills where Lugar flows,
 'Mang moors an' mosses many O,
 The wintry sun the day has clos'd,
 And I'll awa' to Nannie O.

The westlin wind blows loud an' shill,
 The night 's baith mirk and rainy O ;
 But I'll get my plaid, an' out I'll steal,
 An' owre the hill to Nannie O.

My Nannie's charming, sweet, an' young :
 Nae artfu' wiles to win ye O : 10
 May ill befa' the flattering tongue
 That wad beguile my Nannie O.

Her face is fair, her heart is true,
 As spotless as she 's bonnie O :
 The opening gowan, wat wi' dew,
 Nae purer is than Nannie O.

A country lad is my degree,
 An' few there be that ken me O ;
 But what care I how few they be,
 I'm welcome aye to Nannie O. 20

My riches a' s my penny-fee,
 An' I maun guide it cannie O ;
 But warl's gear ne'er troubles me,
 My thoughts are a' my Nannie O.

westlin] western shill] shrill gowan] daisy

Our auld Gudman delights to view
 His sheep an kye thrive bonnie O,
 But I'm as blythe that hauds his pleugh,
 An has nae care but Nannie O

Come weel come woe I care na by
 I'll tak what Heav'n will send me O, 30
 Nae ither care in life have I
 But live, an love my Nannie O

Green grow the Rashes O

Written 178 -4 — Published *Poems* (Edinburgh) 1787

GREEN grow the rashes O
 Green grow the rashes O,
 The sweetest hours that e'er I spend,
 Are spent among the lasses O!

There's nought but care on ev'ry han',
 In ev'ry hour that passes O
 What signifies the life o' man
 An twere na for the lasses O

The warly race may riches chase
 An riches still may fly them O, 10
 An tho' at last they catch them fast,
 Their hearts can ne'er enjoy them O

But gie me a canny hour at e'en
 My arms about my dearie O
 An warly cares an warly men
 May a gae tapsalteerie O!

kye] cows cattle hauds] holds care na by] am indifferent
 warly] worldly tapsalteerie] topsy turvy

For you sae douce, ye sneer at this,
 ~ Ye're nought but senseless asses O :
 The wisest man the warl' saw,
 He dearly lov'd the lasses O.

20

Auld nature swears, the lovely dears
 Her noblest work she classes O :
 Her prentice han' she tried on man,
 An' then she made the lasses O.

Epistle to Davie, a Brother Poet

Written 1784-5.—Published *Poems* (Kilmarnock), 1786

WHILE winds frae aff Ben-Lomond blaw,
 And bar the doors wi' driving snaw,
 And hing us owre the ingle,
 I set me down, to pass the time,
 And spin a verse or twa o' rhyme,
 In hamely westlin jingle.
 While frosty winds blaw in the drift,
 Ben to the chimla lug,
 I grudge a wee the great-folk's gift,
 That live sae bien an' snug ;
 I tent less, and want less
 Their roomy fire-side ;
 But hanker and canker
 To see their cursèd pride.

10

It 's hardly in a body's pow'r,
 To keep, at times, frae being sour,
 To see how things are shar'd ;

douce] sedate

hing] hang ingle] fireplace
 corner bien] comfortable

ben . . . lug] into the chimney
 tent] heed

How best o' chiebs are whyles in want
 While coofs on countless thousands rant
 And ken na how to wair t 20
 But Davie had ne'er fash your head
 Tho' we hae little gear
 We're fit to win our daily bread
 As lang's we're hyle and fier
 Mair spier na' nor fear na'
 Auld age ne'er mind a feg
 The last o' t' the warst o' t'
 Is only but to beg

To lie in kilns and barns at e'en
 When banes are craz'd, and bluid is thin 30
 Is doubtless great distress!
 Yet then content could mak us blest,
 Ev'n then sometimes we'd snatch a taste
 Of truest happiness
 The honest heart that's free frae a
 Intended fraud or guile
 However fortune kick the ba'
 Has aye some cause to smile
 And mind still you'll find still
 A comfort this nae sma' 40
 Nae mair then we'll care then
 Nae farther can we fa'

What tho' like commoners of air
 We wander out we know not where,
 But either house or hal'?

chiebs) fellows coofs) dolts rant) roister wair) spend
 fash) trouble fier) fit mair spier na) more ask not feg) fig
 but hal') without either house or home (hold)

Yet nature's charms, the hills and woods,
The sweeping vales, and foaming floods,
Are free alike to all.

In days when daisies deck the ground,
And blackbirds whistle clear, 50
With honest joy our hearts will bound,
To see the coming year :
On braes when we please then,
We'll sit and sowth a tune ;
Syne rhyme till 't, we'll time till 't,
And sing 't when we hae done.

It 's no in titles nor in rank ;
It 's no in wealth like Lon'on bank,
To purchase peace and rest ;
It 's no in making muckle, mair : 60
It 's no in books, it 's no in lear,
To make us truly blest :
If happiness hae not her seat
And centre in the breast,
We may be wise, or rich, or great,
But never can be blest :
Nae treasures, nor pleasures,
Could make us happy lang ;
The heart aye 's the part aye
That makes us right or wrang. 70

Think ye, that sic as you and I,
Wha drudge and drive thro' wet an' dry,
Wi' never-ceasing toil ;
Think ye, are we less blest than they,
Wha scarcely tent us in their way,
As hardly worth their while?

Alas ! how oft in haughty mood
 God's creatures they oppress !
 Or else neglecting a that's guid
 They riot in excess !
 Baith careless and fearless
 Of either heav'n or hell !
 Esteeming, and deeming
 It a' an idle tale !

80

Then let us cheerfu' acquiesce
 Nor make our scanty pleasures less
 By pining at our state ,
 And even should misfortunes come,
 I, here wha sit hae met wi' some,
 An' s' thankful' for them yet
 They gie the wit of age to youth ,
 They let us ken oursel ,
 They mak us see the naked truth
 The real guid and ill
 Tho' losses and crosses,
 Be lessons right severe,
 There's wit there ye'll get there
 Ye'll find nae other where

90

Holy Willie's Prayer

Written 1784 — Published Stewart and Meikle's Tracts 1799

O THOU, wha in the Heavens does dwell
 Wha as it pleases best thyself
 Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell
 A' for thy glory,
 And no for ony guid or ill
 They've done afore thee !

I bless and praise thy matchless might,
 Whan thousands thou hast left in night,
 That I am here afore thy sight,

10

For gifts an' grace
 A burnin' an' a shinin' light,
 To a' this place.

What was I, or my generation,
 That I should get sic exaltation?
 I, wha deserve most just damnation,
 For broken laws,
 Sax thousand years 'fore my creation,
 Thro' Adam's cause.

20

When frae my mither's womb I fell,
 Thou might hae plungèd me in hell,
 To gnash my gums, to weep and wail,
 In burnin' lakes,
 Where damnèd devils roar and yell,
 Chain'd to their stakes ;

Yet I am here a chosen sample,
 To show thy grace is great and ample ;
 I'm here a pillar in thy temple,
 Strong as a rock,
 A guide, a buckler, and example
 To a' thy flock. . . .

30

But yet, O Lord ! confess I must
 At times I'm fash'd wi' fleshly lust ;
 An' sometimes too, in warldly trust,
 Vile self gets in ;
 But thou remembers we are dust,
 Defil'd in sin. . . .

fash'd] troubled

May be thou lets this fleshly thorn
 Beset thy servant e en and morn
 Lest he owre high and proud should turn
 That he s sae gifted 40
 If sae thy hand maun e en be borne
 Until thou lift it

Lord bless thy chosen in this place
 For here thou has a chosen race,
 But God confound their stubborn face
 And blast their name
 Wha bring thy elders to disgrace
 An public shame

Lord mind Gawn Hamilton's deserts
 He drinks an swears an' plays at cartes 50
 Yet has sae mony takin arts
 Wi grit an' sma
 Frae God s ain priest the people s hearts
 He steals awa

An when we chasten d him therefor
 Thou kens how he bred sic a splore
 As set the warld in a roar
 O laughin at us
 Curse thou his basket and his store
 hail and potatoes 60

Lord hear my earnest cry an pray r
 Against that presbyt ry o Ayr
 Thy strong right hand Lord make it bare
 Upo their heads,
 Lord weigh it down and dinna spare,
 For their misdeeds,

cartes} cards
 greens

*splore} frolic hubbub

hail} coleworts curly

But, Lord, remember me and mine
 Wi' mercies temp'ral and divine,
 That I for gear and grace may shine
 Excell'd by nane,
 And a' the glory shall be thine,
 Amen, Amen !

70

Death and Doctor Hornbook

Written 1785.—Published *Poems* (Edinburgh), 1787

SOME books are lies frae end to end,
 And some great lies were never penn'd :
 Ev'n ministers, they hae been kenn'd,
 In holy rapture,
 A rousing whid at times to vend,
 And nail't wi' Scripture.

But this that I am gaun to tell,
 Which lately on a night befell,
 Is just as true 's the Deil 's in hell
 Or Dublin city :
 That e'er he nearer comes oursel
 'S a muckle pity.

10

The Clachan yill had made me canty,
 I wasna fou, but just had plenty ;
 I stacher'd whyles, but yet took tent aye
 To free the ditches ;
 An' hillocks, stanes, an' bushes kent aye
 Frae ghaists an' witches.

gear] worldly goods Clachan yill] village ale canty] jolly fou]
 whid] fib stacher'd] staggered tent] care

The rising moon began to glow
The distant Cummock hills out-owre
To count her horns wi a my pow'r
I set myself,

But whether she had three or four
I could na tell

I was come round about the hull
And todlin down on Wilhe's mill,
Setting my staff wi a my skill
To keep me sicker.

Tho leeward whyles against my will
I took a hicker

I there wi' Something does forgather,
That pat me in an eerie swither
An awfu' scythe out-owre ae shouter,
Clear-dangling hang

A three toe d lester on the ither
Lay large an lang

Its stature seem'd lang Scotch ells twa
The queerest shape that e'er I saw
For fient a wame it had ava
And then its shanks

They were as thin as sharp an sma
As cheeks o' branks

Guid een quo I Friend! hae ye been mawin,
When ither folk are busy sawin?

It seem'd to mak a kind o' stan,
But naething spak

At length says I Friend wh are ye gaun?
Will ye go back?

glowre] stare	saker] secure	bucker] a short race	pat
swither] made me pause in fear (swither = hesitation)			three-
tae d leister] three-pronged fish spear	wame] belly		cheeks
o branks] sides of a wooden curb			

It spak right howe—' My name is Death,
But be na fley'd.'—Quoth I, ' Guid faith, 50
Ye're maybe come to stap my breath ;

But tent me, billie :
I red ye weel, tak care o' skaith,
See, there 's a gully ! '

' Gudeman,' quo' he, ' put up your whittle,
I'm no design'd to try its mettle ;
But if I did—I wad be kittle

To be mislear'd—
I wad na mind it, no that spittle
Out-owre my beard.' 60

' Weel, weel ! ' says I, ' a bargain be't ;
Come, gies your hand, an' sae we're gree't ;
We'll ease our shanks an' tak a seat—

Come, gies your news ;
This while ye hae been mony a gate,
At mony a house.'

' Ay, ay ! ' quo' he, an' shook his head,
' It 's e'en a lang lang time indeed
Sin' I began to nick the thread,
An' choke the breath : 70

Folk maun do something for their bread,
An' sae maun Death.

' Sax thousand years are near-hand fled,
Sin' I was to the butching bred ;
An' mony a scheme in vain 's been laid
To stap or scaur me ;

Till ane Hornbook 's ta'en up the trade,
An' faith ! he'll waur me.

howe] hollow (voiced) fley'd] scared billie] fellow red]
advise skaith] damage gully] large knife whittle] knife
kittle . . . mislear'd] apt to be mischievous gree't] agreed
gate] way waur] worst, get the better of

Ye ken Jock Hornbook i the clachan—
Deil mak his king's hood in a spleuchan ! 80
He s grown sae well acquaint wi Buchan

An ither chaps
The weans haud out their fingers laughin ,
And pouk my hips

Wae 's me for Johnny Ged's Hole now ,
Quoth I if that thae news be true I
His braw calf ward where gowans grew
Sae white and bonnie
Nae doubt they ll rive it wi the plew ,
They ll ruin Johnie ! ' 90

The creature grain d an eldnitch laugh
And says Ye needna yoke the pleugh
Kirk yard, will soon be till d eneugh,
Tak ye nae fear ,
They ll a be trench d wi mony a sheugh
In twa three year

Where I kill d ane a fair strae-death
By loss o blood or want o breath
This night I m free to tak my aith
That Hornbook's skill 100
Has clad a score i their last clath,
By drap and pill

An honest wabster to his trade
Whase wife s twa nieves were scarce weel bred
Gat tippenre-worth to mend her head
When it was sair ,
The wife slade canme to her bed
But neer spak mair

spleuchan] tobacco-pouch calf ward] enclosure for grazing
calves (= churchyard) gowans' dailies grain d] groaned
sheugh] ditch strae-death] death on straw (i.e. in bed)
wabster] weaver nieves] lists

' A country laird had ta'en the batts,
Or some curmurring in his guts, 110
His only son for Hornbook sets,

An' pays him well :

The lad, for twa guid gimmer-pets,
Was laird himsel. . . .

' That 's just a swatch o' Hornbook's way ;
Thus goes he on from day to day,
Thus does he poison, kill, an' slay,
An 's weel pay'd for 't ;
Yet stops me o' my lawfu' prey
Wi' his damn'd dirt. 120

' But, hark ! I'll tell you of a plot,
Tho' dinna ye be speaking o't ;
I'll nail the self-conceited sot
As dead 's a herrin' :
Niest time we meet, I'll wad a groat,
He gets his fairin' ! '

But, just as he began to tell,
The auld kirk-hammer strak the bell
Some wee short hour ayont the twal,
Which rais'd us baith : 130
I took the way that pleas'd mysel,
And sae did Death.

batts] colic curmurring] rumbling gimmer] young ewe
wad] wager fairin'] present from a fair, reward

To William Simpson

Written May 1785 —Published *Poems* (Kilmarnock) 1786

I GAT your letter, winsome Willie,
 Wi gratefu heart I thank you brawlie
 Tho I maun say t I wad be silly,
 An unco vain
 Should I believe my coaxin bulie
 Your flatterin strain

But I se bebeve ye kindly meant it
 I sud be laith to thank ye hinted
 Ironie satire sidelins sklentid
 On my poor Muse 10
 Tho in sic phrausin terms ye ve penn d it,
 I scarce excuse ye

My senses wad be in a creel
 Should I but dare a hope to speel
 Wi Allan or wi Gilbertfield
 The braes o fame
 Or Fergusson the writer-chiel
 A deathless name

(O Fergusson ! thy glorious parts
 Ill suited law s dry musty arts ! 20
 My curse upon your whunstone hearts
 Ye E nbrugh gentry !
 The tythe o what ye waste at cartes
 Wad stow d his pantry !)

brawlie] handsomely unco] very sidelins] obliquely
 sklentid] cast with sinister purpose phrausin] over flattering
 speel] climb writer-chiel] lawyer-chap

Yet when a tale comes i' my head,
Or lasses gie my heart a screed,
As whiles they're like to be my dead,
(O sad disease !)

I kittle up my rustic reed ;
It gies me ease.

30

Auld Coila, now, may fidge fu' fain,
She 's gotten poets o' her ain,
Chiels wha their chanter's winna hain,
But tune their lays,
Till echoes a' resound again
Her weel-sung praise.

Nae poet thought her worth his while,
To set her name in measur'd style ;
She lay like some unkenn'd-of isle,
Beside New Holland,
Or where wild-meeting oceans boil
Besouth Magellan.

40

Ramsay an' famous Fergusson
Gied Forth an' Tay a lift aboon ;
Yarrow an' Tweed, to mony a tune,
Owre Scotland rings,
While Irwin, Lugar, Ayr, an' Doon,
Naebody sings.

Th' Ilissus, Tiber, Thames, an' Seine,
Glide sweet in mony a tunefu' line ;
But, Willie, set your fit to mine,
An' cock your crest,

We'll gar our streams an' burnies shine
Up wi' the best.

50

scree] rip, rent dead] death kittle] tickle fidge] fidget
chanter] pipes, with reeds and finger-holes, for practising bagpipe
tunes hain] spare aboon] above, up fit] foot gar] cause

We'll sing auld Coila's plains an' fells
 Her moors red brown wi' heather bells,
 Her banks an' braes, her dens an' dells
 Where glorious Wallace
 Aft bure the gree as story tells
 Frae Southron billies

60

At Wallace' name, what Scottish blood
 But boils up in a spring-tide flood !
 Oft have our fearless fathers strode
 By Wallace' side,
 Still pressing onward red wat-shod,
 Or glorious died

O sweet are Coila's haughs an' woods,
 When luntwhites chant amang the buds
 And jinkin hares in amorous whids
 Their loves enjoy
 While thro' the braes the cushat croods
 Wi' wailfu cry !

70

Ev'n winter bleak has charms to me
 When winds rave thro' the naked tree,
 Or frost on hills of Ochiltree
 Are hoary gray,
 Or blinding drifts wld furious flee,
 Dark ning the day !

O Nature ! a thy shews an' forms
 To feeling pensive hearts hae charms !
 Whether the summer kindly warms
 Wi' life an' light,
 Or winter howls in gusty storms
 The lang dark night !

80

bure the gree] bore off the pine red wat shod] with shoes wet
 with blood haugh.] fertile valleys whids] gambols cushat]
 wood pigeon croods] coos

The Muse, nae poet ever fand her,
 Till by himsel he learn'd to wander
 Adown some trottin' burn's meander,
 An' no think lang ;
 O sweet, to stray an' pensive ponder
 A heart-felt sang !

90

The warly race may drudge an' drive,
 Hog-shouther, jundie, stretch, an' strive ;
 Let me fair Nature's face describe,
 And I, wi' pleasure,
 Shall let the busy, grumbling hive
 Bum owre their treasure.

Fareweel, ' my rhyme-composing ' brither !
 We've been owre lang unkenn'd to ither :
 Now let us lay our heads thegither,
 In love fraternal ;
 May Envy wallop in a tether,
 Black fiend infernal !

100

While Highlandmen hate tolls an' taxes ;
 While moorlan' herds like guid fat braxies ;
 While Terra Firma, on her axis,
 Diurnal turns,
 Count on a friend, in faith an' practice,
 In Robert Burns. . . .

think lang] weary hog-shouther] thrust with the shoulder
 jundie] jostle herds] herd-boys braxies] flesh of sheep killed
 because of braxy (a disease)

POOR MAILIE'S ELEGY

Written 1785-6 — Published *Poems* (Kilmarnock) 1786

LAMENT in rhyme lament in prose
We saut tears tricklin' down your nose,
Our bardie's fate is at a close,

Past a remead
The last sad cape stane of his woes—
Poor Maizie's dead!

It's no the loss o' warl's gear
That could sae bitter draw the tear
Or mak our bardie downie wear

The mourning weed
He's lost a friend and neighbor dear
In Mahe dead

Thro' a the town she trotted by him,
A lang half mile she could descry him,
Wi' kindly bleat when she did spy him
She ran wi' speed
A friend mair faithfu' ne'er cam nigh him
Than Maule dead

I wat she was a sheep o' sense
An' could behave hersel wi' mense,
I'll say t' she never brak a fence
Thro' thievish greed
Our baird's lanely, keeps the spence
Sin' Maizie's dead

remed] remedy
town] farm steadings

cape stane] cope stone
mense] good breeding

dowie] sad
spence] parlour

Or, if he wanders up the howe,
 Her living image in her yowe
 Comes bleating to him, owre the knowe,
 For bits o' bread;
 An' down the briny pearls rowe
 For Mailie dead. 30

She was nae get o' moorland tips,
 Wi' tawted ket, an' hairy hips;
 For her forbears were brought in ships
 Frae yont the Tweed:
 A bonnier fleesh ne'er cross'd the clips
 Than Mailie's, dead.

Wae worth the man wha first did shape
 That vile wanchancie thing—a rape!
 It maks guid fellows girn an' gape,
 Wi' chokin' dread; 40
 An' Robin's bonnet wave wi' crape
 For Mailie dead.

O a' ye bards on bonnie Doon!
 An' wha on Ayr your chanters tune!
 Come, join the melancholious croon
 O' Robin's reed!
 His heart will never get aboon!
 His Mailie's dead!

howe] glen yowe] ewe knowe] knoll get] offspring
 tawted ket] matted fleece fleesh] fleece clips] shears
 wanchancie] unlucky girn] grin in pain chanters] bagpipes
 get aboon] get above (his sorrow), rejoice again

THE VISION

Written 1785-6 —Published Poems (Kilmarnock) 1786

DUAN FIRST

THE sun had closed the winter day,
 The curlers quat their roarin' play
 An' hunger d' maukin taen her way
 To kail yards green
 While faithless snaws ilk step betray
 Where she has been

The thresher s weary fugin'-tree
 The lee-lang day had tired me
 And when the day had clos'd his ee
 Far i' the west,
 Ben i' the spence right pensive he
 I ga'd to rest

10

There linn'd by the ingle-cheek
 I sat and eyed the spewing reek,
 That fill'd wi' hoast provoking smeeck
 The auld clay biggin',
 An' heard the restless rattons squeak
 About the riggin'

All in this mottie misty clime
 I backward mused on wasted time
 How I had spent my youthful prime
 An' done nae thing
 But stringin' blethers up in rhyme,
 For fools to sing

20

quat] quitted	maukin] hare	kail yards] kitchen gardens
fugin' tree] saw	ben] within	ingle-cheek] jamb of the fire-
place	hoast] rough	biggin'] building
riggin'] roof-tree	mottie] dusty	rattons] rats

Had I to guid advice but harkit,
 I might, by this, hae led a market,
 Or strutted in a bank, and clarkit
 My cash-account :
 While here, half-mad, half-fed, half-sarkit,
 Is a' th' amount. 30

I started, mutt'ring ' blockhead ! coof ! '
 And heaved on high my waukit loof,
 To swear by a' yon starry roof,
 Or some rash aith,
 That I, henceforth, would be rhyme-proof
 Till my last breath—
 When click ! the string the snick did draw ;
 An' jee ! the door gaed to the wa' ;
 And by my ingle-lowe I saw,
 Now bleezin' bright, 40
 A tight outlandish hizzie, braw,
 Come full in sight.

Ye need na doubt I held my whisht ;
 The infant aith, half-form'd, was crusht ;
 I glowr'd as eerie 's I'd been dusht
 In some wild glen ;
 When sweet, like modest worth, she blusht,
 An' steppèd ben.
 Green, slender, leaf-clad holly-boughs
 Were twisted, gracefu', round her brows ; 50
 I took her for some Scottish Muse
 By that same token ;
 And come to stop those reckless vows,
 Would soon been broken. . . .

half-sarkit] half-clad coof] dolt waukit loof] horny palm
 snick] latch ingle-lowe] firelight hizzie] young woman
 held my whisht] kept silence dusht] pushed

PLAN SECOND

With musing-deep astonish'd stare
 I view'd the heavenly-seeming I air
 A whispering throb did witness bear
 Of kindred sweet
 When with an elder Sister's air
 She did me greet

60

All hail! my own inspired bard!
 In me thy native Muse regard!
 Nor longer mourn thy fate is hard
 Thus poorly low,
 I come to give thee such reward
 As we bestow

Know the great Genius of this land
 Has many a light aerial band
 Who all beneath his high command
 Harmoniously,
 As arts or arms they understand
 Their labours ply

70

They Scotia's race among them share
 Some fire the soldier on to dare,
 Some rouse the patriot up to bare
 Corruption's heart
 Some teach the bard a darling care
 The tuneful art

Some bounded to a district-space,
 Explore at large man's infant race,
 To mark the embryotic trace
 Of rustic bard
 And careful note each op'ning grace,
 A guide and guard.

80

‘ Of these am I—Coila my name ;
 And this district as mine I claim,
 Where once the Campbells, chiefs of fame,
 Held ruling pow’r :
 I mark’d thy embryo-tuneful flame,
 Thy natal hour.

90

‘ With future hope I oft would gaze,
 Fond, on thy little early ways,
 Thy rudely-caroll’d, chiming phrase,
 In uncouth rhymes,—
 Fired at the simple artless lays
 Of other times.

‘ I saw thee seek the sounding shore,
 Delighted with the dashing roar ;
 Or when the North his fleecy store
 Drove thro’ the sky,
 I saw grim Nature’s visage hoar
 Struck thy young eye,

100

‘ Or when the deep green-mantled Earth
 Warm-cherish’d ev’ry flow’ret’s birth,
 And joy and music pouring forth
 In ev’ry grove,
 I saw thee eye the gen’ral mirth
 With boundless love.

‘ When ripen’d fields and azure skies
 Call’d forth the reapers’ rustling noise,
 I saw thee leave their ev’ning joys,
 And lonely stalk,
 To vent thy bosom’s swelling rise
 In pensive walk.

110

When youthful love warm blushing strong,
 Keen shivering *shot thy nerves along*
 Those accents, grateful to thy tongue
 Th' adored Name,
 I taught thee how to pour in song
 To soothe thy flame

120

I saw thy pulse's maddening play
 Wild send thee pleasure's devious way,
 Misled by fancy's meteor ray
 By passion driven
 But yet the light that led astray
 Was light from Heaven

I taught thy manners painting strains,
 The loves the ways of simple swains
 Till now o'er all my wide domains
 Thy fame extends,
 And some the pride of Coila's plains
 Become thy friends

130

Thou canst not learn nor can I show
 To paint with Thomson's landscape glow,
 Or wake the bosom melting throe
 With Shenstone's art,
 Or pour with Gray the moving flow
 Warm on the heart

'Yet all beneath th' unrival'd rose
 The lowly daisy sweetly blows
 Tho' large the forest's monarch throws
 His army shade
 Yet green the juicy hawthorn grows
 Adown the glade

140

' Then never murmur nor repine ;
 Strive in thy humble sphere to shine ;
 And trust me, not Potosi's mine,
 Nor king's regard,
 Can give a bliss o'ermatching thine,
 A rustic Bard.

150

' To give my counsels all in one,
 Thy tuneful flame still careful fan ;
 Preserve the dignity of Man,
 With Soul erect ;
 And trust the Universal Plan
 Will all protect.

' And wear thou this ' : She solemn said,
 And bound the holly round my head :
 The polish'd leaves and berries red
 Did rustling play ;
 And, like a passing thought, she fled
 In light away.

160

T o a M o u s e

On turning her up in her nest with the plough,
 November 1785.

Published *Poems* (Kilmarnock), 1786

WEE, sleekit, cow'rin', tim'rous beastie,
 O what a panic 's in thy breastie !
 Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
 Wi' bickering brattle !
 I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee
 Wi' murd'ring pattle !

bickering brattle] hurrying scamper laith] loath pattle]
 plough-staff

I m truly sorry man s dominion
 Has broken Nature s social union
 An justifies that ill opinion
 Which makes thee startle 10
 At me thy poor earth born companion,
 An fellow mortal !

I doubt na whiles but thou may thieve
 What then ? poor beastie thou maun live !
 A daimen-icker in a thrave
 S a sma' request
 I ll get a blessin wi the lave,
 And never miss 't !

Thy wee bit housie too, in ruin !
 Its silly wa s the win s are strewn ! 20
 An naething now to big a new ane
 O foggage green !
 An bleak December s winds ensuin ,
 Baith snell an keen !

Thou saw the fields laid bare and waste,
 An weary winter comun' fast,
 An cozie here beneath the blast
 Thou thought to dwell,
 Till crash ' the cruel coulter past
 Out thro' thy cell 30

That wee bit heap o leaves an' stubble
 Has cost thee mony a weary nibble !
 Now thou s turn d out, for a thy trouble
 But house or hald
 To thole the winter s sleety dribble
 An' cranreuch could !

daimen icker] odd ear of corn
 the lave] the rest big] build
 cranreuch] hoar frost

thraue] twenty four sheaves
 snell] biting thole] endure

Still thou art blest compar'd wi' me !
The present only toucheth thee :
But och ! I backward cast my e'e
On prospects drear !
An' forward tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear !

Written 1785.—Published *Poems* (Kilmarnock), 1786

10

thy lane] by thyself a-gley] wide of the aim
sough] sound of wind stacher] totter flichterin] fluttering

His wee bit ingle blinkin bonnie
 His clean hearth stane his thrifty wife's smile
 The lispin infant prattlin on his knee
 Does a his weary laugh and care beguile
 An' makes him quite forget his labour an' his toil

Belyve the elder bairns come drappin in,
 At service out among the farmers roun , 20
 Some ca the plough some herd some tantie rin
 A ranje errand to a neibor town
 Their eldest hope their Jenny woman grown
 In youthfu bloom love sparklin in her ee
 Comes hame perhaps to shew a braw new gown
 Or deposite her sair won penny fee
 To help her parents dear if they in hardship be

With joy unfeign'd brothers and sisters meet,
 An' each for other's weelfare kindly spiers 30
 The social hours swift wing'd unnoticed fleet
 Each tells the uncoss that he sees or hears ,
 The parents partial eye their hopeful years
 Anticipation forward points the view
 The mother wi her needle an' her sheers
 Gars auld claes look amais as weel's the new ,
 The father mixes a wi admonition due

Their master's an' their mistress's command
 The youngkers a are warn'd to obey ,
 An' munda their labours wi an eydent hand
 An' ne'er tho' out o' sight, to jaulk or play 40

laugh] cark anxiety belyve] by and by ca] drive
 tantie] heedful spiers] inquires uncoss] wonders news
 claes] clothes eydent] diligent jaulk] trifle

' And O ! be sure to fear the Lord alway,
 An' mind your duty, duly, morn an' night !
 Lest in temptation's path ye gang astray,
 Implore His counsel and assisting might :
 They never sought in vain that sought the Lord aright ! '

But hark ! a rap comes gently to the door ;
 Jenny, wha kens the meaning o' the same,
 Tells how a neibor lad cam o'er the moor,
 To do some errands, and convoy her hame.
 The wily mother sees the conscious flame 50
 Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her cheek ;
 Wi' heart-struck anxious care, inquires his name,
 While Jenny hafflins is afraid to speak ;
 Weel-pleased the mother hears it's nae wild worthless rake.

Wi' kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben ;
 A strappin' youth ; he takes the mother's eye ;
 Blythe Jenny sees the visit 's no ill ta'en ;
 The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and kye.
 The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi' joy,
 But blate and laithfu', scarce can weel behave ; 60
 The mother, wi' a woman's wiles, can spy
 What makes the youth sae bashfu' an' sae grave ;
 Weel-pleased to think her bairn's respected like the lave....

But now the supper crowns their simple board,
 The halesome parritch, chief of Scotia's food :
 The sowpe their only hawkie does afford,
 That 'yont the hallan snugly chows her cood ;

hafflins] half
 laithfu'] bashful
 white-faced cow

cracks] chats
 sowpe] sup, spoonful (of milk)
 'yont] beyond

kye] cattle
 hawkie]
 hallan] partition-wall

The dame brings forth in complimentary mood
 To grace the lad, her weel ham'd kebbuck, fell , 70
 And aft he s prest, and aft he ca's it guid ,
 The frugal wife garrulous will tell
 How twas a towmond auld sim lint was i the bell

The cheerfu' supper done wi serious face
 They round the ingle form a circle wide ,
 The sire turns o'er wi patriarchal grace,
 The big ha Bible ance his Father's pride
 His bonnet reverently is laid aside,
 His lyart haffets wearing thin an' bare
 Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide—
 He wales a portion with judicious care 80
 And Let us worship God ! he says with solemn air

Then homeward all take off their several way
 The youngling cottagers retire to rest
 The parent pair their secret homage pay
 And proffer up to Heav'n the warm request,
 That He who stills the raven's clam'rous nest,
 And decks the lily fair in flow'ry pride
 Would in the way His wisdom sees the best
 For them and for their little ones provide ,
 But chuse fly in their hearts with grace divine preside 90

weel ham'd] well saved	kebbuck] cheese	fell] pungent
towmond] twelve month	lint i the bell] flax in flower	lyart]
Grey	haffets] temples	wales] chooses

I've heard my reverend grannie say,
 In lanely glens ye like to stray
 Or where auld ruin'd castles gray
 Nod to the moon
 Ye fright the night wand'ers way,
 Wi' eldritch croon

30

When twilight did my grannie summon
 To sav' her prayers dounce honest woman !
 Aft'ont the dyke she's heard you bammun ,
 Wi' eerie drone
 Or rustlin' thro' the boortrees comin'
 Wi' heavy groan

Ae dreary wind, winter night
 The stars shot down wi' silentin' light,
 Wi' you mysel' I gat a fright
 Ayont the lough
 Ye like a rash-buss stood in sight
 Wi' wiving sough

40

The cudgel in my nieve did shake
 Each bristled hair stood like a stake
 When wi' an eldritch stoor' quack quack '
 Among the springs
 Awa' ye squatter'd like a drake
 On whistlin' wings

Let warlocks grim an' wither'd hags
 Tell how wi' you on ragweed nags
 They skim the mires an' dizzy crags
 Wi' wicked speed
 And in kirk yards renew their leagues
 Owre howkit dead.

50

eldritch] unearthly croon] howl or moan dyke] dry stone wall
 boortrees, elder bushes silentin'] ominous rash-buss] clump
 of rushes stoor'] harsh squatter'd] fluttered in the water
 ragweed nags] ragwort (used as horses howkit] disinterred

Thence country wives, wi' toil an' pain,
 May plunge an' plunge the kirk in vain ;
 For oh ! the yellow treasure 's taen

By witchin' skill ;
 An' dawtit twal-pint Hawkie's gane
 As yell 's the bill.

60

Thence mystic knots mak great abuse
 On young guidmen, fond, keen, an' crouse
 When the best wark-lume i' the house,

By cantrip wit,
 Is instant made no worth a louse,
 Just at the bit.

When thowes dissolve the snawy hoord,
 An' float the jinglin' icy-boord,
 Then water-kelpies haunt the foord,

By your direction,
 An' 'nighted trav'lers are allur'd
 To their destruction.

70

An' aft your moss-traversing spunkies
 Decoy the wight that late an' drunk is :
 The bleezin, curst, mischievous monkies

Delude his eyes,
 Till in some miry slough he sunk is,
 Ne'er mair to rise.

When masons' mystic word an' grip
 In storms an' tempests raise you up,
 Some cock or cat your rage maun stop,

80

Or, strange to tell !
 The youngest brither ye wad whip
 Aff straught to hell.

kirk] churn dawtit] petted twal-pint Hawkie] cow yielding
 twelve pints at a milking yell] milkless bill] bull guidmen]
 husbands crouse] confident wark-lume] tool cantrip] magic
 bit] crisis thowes] thaws spunkies] will-o'-the-wisps

Lang syne, in Eden's bonnie yard
 When youthfu' lovers first were pair'd
 And all the soul of love they shar'd

The raptur'd hour
 Sweet on the fragrant flow'ry sward,
 In shady bow'r, 90

Then you, ye sly suck-drawing dog!
 Ye cam to Paradise incog

An' play'd on man a cursed brogue,
 (Black be you fa'!)

An' gied the infant warld a shog
 Maist ruin'd a

D've mind that day when in a buzz
 Wi' reekit duds an' reestit guzz,
 Ye did present your smoutie phiz
 Mang better folk 100

An' sklent on the man of Uz
 Your spitefu' joke?

An' how ye gat him i' your thrall
 An' brak him out o' house an' hal
 While scabs an' botches did him gall
 Wi' bitter claw

An' low'd his ill-tongu'd wicked scawl,
 Was warst ava?

But a' your domgs to rehearse -
 Your wily snares an' fechtin' fierce 110
 Sin' that day Michael did you pierce
 Down to this time

Wad ding a Lallan tongue or Erse
 In prose or rhyme

yard] garden suck-drawing] trick-contriving brogue] affront
 fa'] lot shog] shock buzz] flurry reekit duds] smoky rags
 reestit guzz] shriveled wig sklent] cast with sinister purpose
 claw] scratching low'd] let loose scawl] scold (wife) ding]
 beat Lallan] Lowland Erse] Gaelic

An' now, auld Cloots, I ken ye're thinkin',
 A certain Bardie's rantin', drinkin',
 Some luckless hour will send him linkin',

To your black pit ;
 But faith ! he'll turn a corner jinkin',
 An' cheat you yet.

120

But fare you weel, auld Nickie-ben !
 O wad ye tak a thought an' men' !
 Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken—
 Still hae a stake :
 I'm wae to think upo' yon den,
 Ev'n for your sake !

H a l l o w e e n ¹

Written ?1785-6.—Published *Poems* (Kilmarnock), 1786

UPON that night, when fairies light
 On Cassilis Downans² dance,
 Or owre the lays, in splendid blaze,
 On sprightly coursers prance ;
 Or for Colean the rout is ta'en,
 Beneath the moon's pale beams ;
 There, up the Cove,³ to stray an' rove,
 Among the rocks and streams
 To sport that night ;

¹ Is thought to be a night when Witches, Devils, and other mischief-making beings, are all abroad on their baneful, midnight errands : particularly, those aerial people, the Fairies, are said, on that night, to hold a grand Anniversary.

² Certain little, romantic, rocky, green hills, in the neighbourhood of the ancient seat of the Earls of Cassilis.

³ A noted cavern near Colean-house, called the Cove of Colean ; which, as well as Cassilis Downans, is famed, in country story, for being a favourite haunt of Fairies.

linkin'] hurrying
 lays] leas

jinkin'] dodging

aiblins] perhaps

Amang the bonnie winding banks 10
 Where Doon rins, wimplin', clear,
 Where Bruce² ance ruled the martial ranks,
 An shook his Carrick spear,
 Some merry friendly, country-folks
 Together did convene
 To burn their nits an' pou their stocks,
 An haud their Halloween
 Fu blythe that night

The lasses feat, an cleanly neat,
 Mair braw than when they re fine, 20
 Their faces blythe fu sweetly kythe
 Hearts leal an warm an kin
 The lads sae trig wi wooer babs
 Weel knotted on their garten
 Some unco blate an' some wi gabs
 Gar lasses hearts gang startin
 Whyles fast at night

Then first an foremost, thro the Lail
 Their stocks³ maun a be sought ance
 They steek their een an grape an wale 30
 For muckle anes an' straught anes

The famous family of that name the ancestors of ROBERT the great Deliverer of his country were Earls of Carrick

* The first ceremony of Halloween is pulling each a Stock or plant of kail They must go out hand in hand with eyes shut and pull the first they meet with its being big or little straight or crooked is prophetic of the size and shape of the grand object of all their Spells—the husband or wife If any yird or earth stick to the root that is *focher* or fortune and the taste of the custoc that is the heart of the stem is indicative of the natural temper and disposition Lastly the stems or to give them their ordinary

wimplin]	winding	nits]	nuts	haud]	hold	celebrate	feat]
spruce	kythe]	reveal	leal]	loyal	wooer babs]	love-knots	
garten]	garters	gabs]	bold	speeches	steek]	shut	grape]
grope	wale]	choose					

Poor hav'rel Will fell aff the drift,
 An' wander'd thro' the bow-kail,
 An' pou'd, for want o' better shift,
 A runt was like a sow-tail,
 Sae bow't that night.

Then, straught or crookèd, yird or nane,
 They roar an' cry a' throu'ther ;
 The very wee-things, toddlin, rin,
 Wi' stocks out-owre their shouther ; 40
 An' gif the custock 's sweet or sour,
 Wi' joctelegs they taste them ;
 Syne coziely, aboon the door,
 Wi' cannie care they've plac'd them
 To lie that night. . . .

The auld guidwife's weel-hoordit nits¹
 Are round an' round divided,
 An' mony lads' an' lasses' fates
 Are there that night decided :
 Some kindle, couthie, side by side, 50
 An' burn thegither trimly ;
 Some start awa, wi' saucy pride,
 An' jump out-owre the chimlie
 Fu' high that night.

appellation, the *runts*, are placed somewhere above the head of the door ; and the christian names of the people whom chance brings into the house, are, according to the priority of placing the *runts*, the names in question.

¹ Burning the nuts is a favourite charm. They name the lad and lass to each particular nut, as they lay them in the fire ; and according as they burn quietly together, or start from beside one another, the course and issue of the Courtship will be

hav'rel] half-witted	bow-kail] coleworts with crooked stems
throu'ther] pell-mell	joctelegs] clasp-knives
couthie] lovingly	hoordit] hoarded

Jean slips in twa wi tentie e'e,
 Wha twas she wadna tell,
 But this is Jock an this is me
 She says in to hersel
 He bleez d owre her, an she owre him,
 As they wad never mair part , 60
 Till fuff ! he started up the lum,
 An Jean had e'en a sair heart
 To sec't that night

Poor Willie wi his bow-kail runt
 Was brunt wi prumsie Mallie,
 An Mary nae doubt took the drunt,
 To be compar d to Willie
 Mall s nit lap out wi' pridesu fling
 An' her ain fit it brunt it , 70
 While Willie lap an swoor by jing
 Twas just the way he wanted
 To be that night

Meg fain wad to the barn gane
 To winn three wechts o nathing ,¹
 But for to meet the Deil her lane
 She pat but little faith in

This charm must likewise be performed unperceived and alone
 You go to the barn and open both doors, taking them off the
 hinges if possible for there is danger that the Being about to
 appear may shut the doors and do you some mischief Then take
 that instrument used in winnowing the corn which in our country-
 dialect we call a *wecht* and go thro all the attitudes of letting
 down corn against the wind Repeat it three times and the third
 time an apparition will pass thro the barn in at the windy door
 and out at the other having both the figure in question and the
 appearance or retinue marking the employment or station in life

lum] chimney prumsie] affectedly nice drunt] pet winn]
 winnow her lane] by herself

She gies the herd a pickle nits,
 And twa red-cheekit apples,
 To watch, while for the barn she sets,
 In hopes to see Tam Kipples 80
 That vera night.

She turns the key wi' cannie thraw,
 An' owre the threshold ventures ;
 But first on Sawnie gies a ca',
 Syne bauldly in she enters ;
 A ratton rattl'd up the wa',
 An' she cried, Lord preserve her !
 An' ran thro' midden-hole an' a',
 An' pray'd wi' zeal an' fervour 90
 Fu' fast that night.

They hoy't out Will, wi' sair advice ;
 They hecht him some fine braw ane ;
 It chanced the stack he faddom'd thrice,¹
 Was timmer-propt for thrawin' :
 He tak's a swirlie auld moss-oak
 For some black gruesome Carlin ;
 An' loot a winze, an' drew a stroke,
 Till skin in blypes cam haurlin'
 Aff's nieves that night.

¹ Take an opportunity of going, unnoticed, to a *Bear-stack*, and fathom it three times round. The last fathom of the last time, you will catch in your arms, the appearance of your future conjugal yoke-fellow.

herd] herd-boy pickle] few midden-hole] gutter at the
 bottom of the dung-hill hoy't] kept urging sair] sore (= mis-
 leading) hecht] promised timmer-propt for thrawin'] propped
 with timber against warping swirlie] twisted Carlin] witch
 loot a winze] let (uttered) a curse blypes] shreds haurlin']
 peeling

A wanton widow Leczie was,
 As cantie as a kittlin
 But och ! that night, amang the shaws
 She gat a learfu settlin' !
 She thro the whins an by the cairn,
 An owre the hill gaed scribevin ,
 Where three laird s lands met at a burn ¹
 To dip her left sark sleeve in
 Was bent that night

100

Whyles owre a linn the burnie plays
 As thro the glen it wimpl t,
 Whyles round a rocky scar it strays ,
 Whyles in a wael it dimpl t ,
 Whyles glitter d to the nightlly rays,
 Was bickering dancing dazzle ,
 Whyles cookit underneath the braes
 Below the spreading hazel,
 Unseen that night

110

Amang the brachens on the brae
 Between her an' the moon,
 The Deil or else an outler quey,
 Gat up an gae a croon

120

You go out one or more for this is a social spell to a south running spring or rivulet where three Lairds lands meet and dip your left shirt sleeve Go to bed in sight of a fire and hang your wet sleeve before it to dry Ly awake and sometime near mid night an apparition having the exact figure of the grand object in question will come and turn the sleeve as if to dry the other side of it

kittlin] kitten shaws] copses whins] forze scribevin"]
 running swiftly linn] waterfall wimpl t] swandered scar]
 cliff bank wael] eddy cookit] appeared and disappeared by
 fits outler quey] young cow lying out by night

Poor Leezie's heart maist lap the hool ;
 Near lav'rock-height she jumpit,
 But miss'd a fit, an' in the pool
 Out-owre the lugs she plumpit,
 Wi' a plunge that night.

In order, on the clean hearth-stane,
 The luggies ¹ three are ranged ;
 And every time great care is ta'en,
 To see them duly changed : 130
 Auld uncle John, wha wedlock's joys
 Sin' Mar's-year did desire,
 Because he gat the toom dish thrice,
 He heav'd them on the fire
 In wrath that night.

Wi' merry sangs, an' friendly cracks,
 I wat they did na weary ;
 And unco tales, an' funny jokes,—
 Their sports were cheap and cheery ;
 Till butter'd sow'ns,² wi' fragrant lunt, 140
 Set a' their gabs a-steerin' ;
 Syne, wi' a social glass o' strunt,
 They parted aff careerin'
 Fu' blythe that night.

¹ Take three dishes ; put clean water in one, foul water in another, and leave the third empty : blindfold a person, and lead him to the hearth where the dishes are ranged ; he (or she) dips the left hand : if by chance in the clean water, the future husband or wife will come to the bar of Matrimony, a Maid ; if in the foul, a widow ; if in the empty dish, it foretells, with equal certainty, no marriage at all. It is repeated three times ; and every time the arrangement of the dishes is altered.

² Sowens, with butter instead of milk to them, is always the *Halloween Supper*.

lap the hool] leapt out of her skin lav'rock-height] lark-high
 lugs] ears luggies] small wooden dishes toom] empty cracks]
 talk unco] strange sow'ns] flummery of oats lunt] steam
 gabs] mouths, jaws a-steerin'] moving strunt] liquor

The Auld Farmer's New-Year Morning Salutation to his Auld Mare, Maggie

On giving her the accustomed ripp of corn to
hansel in the New Year

Written 1786—Published *Poems* (Kilmarnock) 1786

A GUID New-Year I wish thee, Maggie !
Hae there s a ripp to thy auld baggie
Tho thou s howe backit now an knaggie
I ve seen the day,
Thou could hae gane like ony staggie
Out-owre the lay

Tho now thou s dowie stiff, an crazy
An thy auld hude as white s a daisie
I ve seen thee dappl t sleek an glaizie
A bonnie gray
He should been tight that daur t to raize thee,
Ance in a day

10

Thou ance was i the foremost rank
A filly buirdly steeve, an swank
An set weel down a shapely shank,
As e er tread vird,
An' could hae flown out-owre a stank
Like ony bird.

ripp] handful of unthreshed corn to hansel in] to be a first
gift for howe backit] hollow backed knaggie] lean and bony
staggie] young horse dowie] spiritless glaizie] smooth glossy
raize] rouse buirdly] stalwart steeve] firm swank] limber
yard] earth stank] pool of standing water

20

30

Wi' maiden air !

40

guid-father's] father-in-law's tocher] marriage-portion
minnie] mother slee] sly donsie] vicious tawie] easy to
handle sonsie] good-natured hoyte] amble crazily wintle]
lurch saumont-coble] flat boat used in spearing salmon jinker
noble] noble goer wauble] wobble

Thou never braindg't, an' fetch't, an' fliskit,
But thy auld tail thou wad hae whiskit,
An' spread abreed thy weel-fill'd briskit,
Wi' pith an' pow'r,
Till spritty knowes wad rair't and riskit,
An' slypet owre.

When frosts lay lang, an' snaws were deep,
An' threaten'd labour back to keep,
I gied thy cog a wee bit heap
 Aboon the timmer ;
I kenn'd my Maggie wad na sleep
 For that, or simmer.

In cart or car thou never reestit ;
The steyst brae thou wad hae fac't it ;
Thou never lap, an' sten't, and breastit,
Then stood to blaw ;
But, just thy step a wee thing hastit,
Thou snoov't awa.

My pleugh is now thy bairn-time a',
Four gallant brutes as e'er did draw ;
Forbye sax mae I've sell't awa
 That thou hast nurst :
They drew me thretteen pund an' twa,
 The vera warst.

braindg't] drew unsteadily fetch't] stopped suddenly and then
rushed on fliskit] fretted at the yoke briskit] breast spritty
knowes] hillocks full of sprit (rush) roots rair't] roared riskit]
cracked slypet owre] fallen smoothly over aboon the
timmer] above the wooden (edge) or] ere reestit] was restive
steyest] steepest sten't] reared breastit] sprang forward
snoov't awa] went steadily on pleugh] = plough-team thy
bairn-time a] all thy offspring

Mony a sair *darg* we twa hae wrought,
 An wi the weary warl fought !
 An mony an anxious day I thought
 We wad be beat !
 Yet here to crazy age we re brought,
 Wi something yet

And think na my auld trusty servan',
 That now perhaps thou s less deservin ,
 An thy auld days may end in starvin ,
 For my last fou
 A heapit stumpart I ll reserve ane
 Laid by for you

100

We ve worn to crazy years thegither
 We ll toyte about wi ane anither ,
 Wi tentie care I ll flit thy tether
 To some hain d rig
 Where ye may nobly rax your leather
 Wi sma fatigue

The Twa Dogs

Written 1786 — Published *Poems* (Kilmarnock) 1786

TWAS in that place o Scotland s Isle
 That bears the name o auld King Col
 Upon a bonnie day in June
 When wearin through the afternoon
 Twa dogs that werena thrang at hame
 Forgather d ance upon a time

fou] bushel stumpart] eighth part of a bushel toyte]
 totter flit] shift hain d rig] spared ridge rax] stretch
 thrang] busy

The first I'll name, they ca'd him Caesar,
 Was keepit for his Honour's pleasure ;
 His hair, his size, his mouth, his lugs,
 Shew'd he was nane o' Scotland's dogs, 10
 But whalpit some place far abroad,
 Where sailors gang to fish for cod.

His lockèd, letter'd, braw brass collar,
 Shew'd him the gentleman and scholar ;
 But though he was o' high degree,
 The fient a pride, nae pride had he ;
 But wad hae spent an hour caressin'
 E'en wi' a tinkler-gipsy's messan :
 At kirk or market, mill or smiddie,
 Nae tawted tyke, though e'er sae duddie, 20
 But he wad stan't as glad to see him,
 An' stroan't on stanes an' hillocks wi' him.

The tither was a ploughman's collie,
 A rhyming, ranting, raving billie,
 Wha for his friend and comrade had him,
 And in his freaks had Luath ca'd him,
 After some dog in Highland sang,
 Was made lang syne—Lord knows how lang.

He was a gash an' faithfu' tyke,
 As ever lap a sheugh or dyke ; 30
 His honest, sonsie, bawsent face
 Aye gat him friends in ilka place.

whalpit] whelped	messan] mongrel	smiddie] smithy
tawted tyke] matted cur	duddie] ragged	stroan't] made water
rantin] rollicking	gash] wise	sheugh] ditch
stone wall	bawsent] white-streaked	dyke] dry

His breast was white his touseie back
 Weel clad wi' coat o' glossy black,
 His gawsie tail wi' upward curl
 Hung owre his hurdies wi' a swirl

Nae doubt but they were sam o' ither,
 And unco pack and thack thegither
 Wi' social nose whyles snuff'd and snowkit,
 Whyles mice and moudieworts they howkit 40
 Whyles scour'd awa in lang excursion
 And worried ither in diversion,
 Until wi' daffin weary grown
 Upon a knowe they sat them down,
 And there began a lang digression
 About the lords o' the creation

CAESAR

I've aften wonder'd honest Luath,
 What sort o' life poor dogs like you have
 An' when the gentry's life I saw
 What way poor bodies liv'd ava 50
 Our Laird gets in his rack'd rents
 His coals has kam and a his stents,
 He rises when he likes himsel
 His flunkies answer at the bell
 He ca's his coach he ca's his horse
 He draws a bonny silken purse
 As lang's my tail whare through the steeks,
 The yellow letter'd Geordie keeks

touseie] shaggy gawsie] flourishing hurdies] buttocks
 pack and thack] confidentially intimate snowkit] examined by
 snuffing moudieworts] moles howkit] unearthed kam]
 rents in kind stents] dues steeks] stitches keeks] peeps

Frae morn to e'en it's nought but toiling
 At baking, roasting, frying, boiling ; 60
 And though the gentry first are stechin',
 Yet ev'n the ha' folk fill their pechan
 Wi' sauce, ragouts, and sic like trashtrie,
 That's little short o' downright wastrie.
 Our whipper-in, wee blastit wonner !
 Poor worthless elf ! it eats a dinner
 Better than ony tenant man
 His Honour has in a' the lan' ;
 An' what poor cot-folk pit their painch in,
 I own it's past my comprehension. 70

LUATH.

Trowth, Caesar, whyles they're fash'd eneugh ;
 A cotter howkin' in a sheugh,
 Wi' dirty stanes biggin' a dyke,
 Baring a quarry, and sic like ;
 Himsel', a wife, he thus sustains,
 A smytrie o' wee duddy weans,
 And nought but his han' darg to keep
 Them right and tight in thack and rape.

And when they meet wi' sair disasters,
 Like loss o' health, or want o' masters, 80
 Ye maist wad think, a wee touch langer,
 And they maun starve o' cauld and hunger ;
 But how it comes, I never kent yet,
 They're maistly wonderfu' contented ;
 An' buirdly chiels and clever hizzies
 Are bred in sic a way as this is.

stechin'] cramming pechan] stomach wee blastit wonner]
 tiny damn'd marvel pit] put painch] paunch fash'd]
 troubled biggin'] building smytrie] a numerous company
 han' darg] labour of his hands thack and rape] thatch and rope

CAESAR

But then to see how ye re neglectit
 How huff d and cuff d and disrespeckit,
 Lord man ! our gentry care as little
 For delvers ditchers and sic cattle ,
 They gang as saucy by poor folk
 As I wad by a stinking brock

90

I ve noticed on our Laird's court day
 An mony a time my heart's been wae,
 Poor tenant bodies scant o' cash
 How they maun thole a factor's snash
 He'll stamp and threaten, curse and swear,
 He'll apprehend them, poun'd their gear
 While they maun stan', wi' aspect humble,
 An' hear it a' an' fear an' tremble !

100

I see how folk live that hae riches ,
 But surely poor folk maun be wretches !

LUATH

They're no sae wretched's ane wad think
 Though constantly on poortith's brink
 They're sae accustom'd wi' the sight
 The view o't gies them little fright

Then chance and fortune are sae guided,
 They're aye m' less or mair provided
 An' though fatigued wi' close employment,
 A blink o' rest's a sweet enjoyment

110

The dearest comfort o' their lives
 Their grushue weans an' faithfu' wives
 The prattling things are just their pride
 That sweetens a' their fireside

brock] badger thole] endure snash] abuse poun'd] distraint
 poortith] poverty grushue] of thriving growth

And whyles twalpenney-worth o' nappy
 Can mak the bodies unco happy ;
 They lay aside their private cares
 To mind the Kirk and State affairs :
 They'll talk o' patronage and priests,
 Wi' kindling fury i' their breasts ; 120
 Or tell what new taxation 's comin',
 And ferlie at the folk in Lon'on.

As bleak-faced Hallowmas returns
 They get the jovial rantin' kirns,
 When rural life of ev'ry station
 Unite in common recreation ;
 Love blinks, Wit slaps, and social Mirth
 Forgets there 's Care upo' the earth.

That merry day the year begins
 They bar the door on frosty win's ; 130
 The nappy reeks wi' mantling ream,
 And sheds a heart-inspiring steam ;
 The luntin' pipe and sneeshin'-mill
 Are handed round wi' right gude-will ;
 The canty auld folks crackin' crouse,
 The young anes ranting through the house—
 My heart has been sae fain to see them
 That I for joy hae barkit wi' them.

Still it 's owre true that ye hae said,
 Sic game is now owre aften play'd. 140
 There 's mony a creditable stock
 O' decent, honest, fawsont folk,
 Are riven out baith root and branch
 Some rascal's pridefu' greed to quench,

nappy] ale	ferlie] marvel	kirns] harvest-homes	reeks]
smokes, steams	ream] foam	luntin] smoking	sneeshin'-
mill] snuff-box	crackin' crouse]	chatting complacently	faw-
sont] orderly			

Wha thinks to knut himsel the faster
 In favour wi some gentle master,
 Wha aiblins thrang a parliamentin',
 For Britain's guid his saul indentin—

CAESAR

Haith lad, ye little ken about it,
 For Britain's guid f—guid faith f I doubt it f 150
 Say rather gaun as Premiers lead him
 And saying ay or no s they bid him f
 At operas and plays parading,
 Mortgaging gambling masquerading
 Or maybe in a frolic dast
 To Hague or Calais tak a waft
 To make a tour an tak a whirl,
 To learn *bon ton* an see the worl'
 There at Vienna or Versailles
 He rives his father's auld entails, 160
 Or by Madrid he takes the rout,
 To thrum guitars and fecht wi' nowt,
 Or down Italian vista startles,
 Whore hunting amang groves o myrtles,
 Then bouses drumly German water,
 To make himsel look fair and fatter,
 And clear the consequential sorrows
 Love gifts of Carnival signoras
 For Britain's guid f—for her destruction f
 Wi dissipation feud and faction f 170

LUATH

Hech man f dear sirs f is that the gate
 They waste sae mony a brow estate?

indentin] indenturing fecht wi nowt] fight with cattle (= see
 bull fights) drumly] turbid gate] way

Are we sae foughten and harass'd
For gear to gang that gate at last?

O would they stay aback frae courts,
An' please themselves wi' countra sports,
It wad for ev'ry ane be better,
The laird, the tenant, an' the cotter !
For thae frank, rantin', ramblin' billies,
Fient haet o' them 's ill-hearted fellows :
Except for breakin' o' their timmer,
Or speaking lightly o' their limmer,
Or shootin' o' a hare or moor-cock,
The ne'er-a-bit they're ill to poor folk.

180

But will ye tell me, Master Caesar,
Sure great folk's life 's a life o' pleasure ?
Nae could nor hunger e'er can steer them,
The vera thought o't needna fear them.

CAESAR.

Lord, man, were ye but whyles where I am,
The gentles ye wad ne'er envy 'em.

190

It 's true, they needna starve or sweat,
Thro' winter's cauld or simmer's heat ;
They've nae sair wark to craze their banes,
An' fill auld age wi' grips an' granes :
But human bodies are sic fools,
For a' their colleges and schools,
That when nae real ills perplex them,
They make enow themselves to vex them,
An' aye the less they hae to sturt them,
In like proportion, less will hurt them.

200

A country fellow at the pleugh,
His acre 's till'd, he 's right eneugh ;

foughten] troubled, driven
woods limmer] mistress

fient haet] the devil a one timmer]
steer] molest sturt] fret

A country girl at her wheel
 Her dizen s done she s unco weel
 But gentlemen an ladies warst
 Wi ev n down want o wark are curst
 They loiter lounging, lank and lazy
 Though de il haet ails them yet uneasy
 Their day's insipid dull and tasteless
 Their nights unquiet lang and restless 210

And ev n their sports their balls, and races,
 Their galloping through public places
 There s sic parade sic pomp and art
 The joy can scarcely reach the heart

The men cast out in party matches
 Then sowther a' in deep debauches
 Ae night they re mad wi drink and whoring
 Neist day their life is past enduring

The ladies arm in-arm in clusters
 As great and gracious a s sisters , 220
 But hear their absent thoughts o ither,
 They re a run de ils and jads thegither
 Whyles owre the wee bit cup and platie
 They sip the scandal potion pretty
 Or lee-lang nights wi crabbit leuks
 Pore owre the devil s pictur d beuks
 Stake on a chance a farmer s stack-yard
 And cheat like ony unhang d blackguard

There s some exceptions man and woman ,
 But this is gentry s life in common 230

By this the sun was out o sight
 And darker gloamin brought the night

dizen] dozen (reeb)
 downright devils
 twilight

sowther] soldier patch up
 devil s pictur d beuks] cards

run de ils]
 gloamin]

The bum-clock humm'd wi' lazy drone,
 The kye stood rowtin' i' the loan ;
 When up they gat and shook their lugs,
 Rejoiced they werena men but dogs ;
 And each took aff his several way,
 Resolved to meet some ither day.

To a Mountain Daisy

On turning one down with the plough, in April, 1786

Published *Poems* (Kilmarnock), 1786

WEE modest crimson-tippèd flow'r,
 Thou 's met me in an evil hour ;
 For I maun crush amang the stoure
 Thy slender stem :
 To spare thee now is past my pow'r,
 Thou bonnie gem.

Alas ! it 's no thy neibor sweet,
 The bonnie lark, companion meet,
 Bending thee 'mang the dewy weet
 Wi' spreckl'd breast,
 When upward-springing, blythe, to greet
 The purpling east.

10

Could blew the bitter-biting north
 Upon thy early humble birth ;
 Yet cheerfully thou glinted forth
 Amid the storm,
 Scarce rear'd above the parent-earth
 Thy tender form.

bum-clock] humming beetle
 loan] lane

kye] cows

rowtin] lowing

stoure] dust glinted] peeped

The flaunting flow'rs our gardens yield
 High shelt'ring woods and wa's main shield 20
 But thou beneath the random bield

O clod or stane
 Adorns the hystie stibble field
 Unseen alane

There in thy scanty mantle clad
 Thy snawy bosom sun-ward spread,
 Thou lifts thy unassuming head
 In humble guise
 But now the share uptears thy bed
 And low thou lies ! 30

Such is the fate of artless maid
 Sweet flow'ret of the rural shade
 By love's simplicity betray'd
 And guileless trust,
 Till she like thee all soil'd is laid
 Low in the dust

Such is the fate of simple bard
 On life's rough ocean luckless starr'd
 Unskilful he to note the card
 Of prudent lore 40
 Till billows rage and gales blow hard
 And overwhelm him o'er !

Such fate to suffering worth is giv'n
 Who long with wants and woes has striv'n
 By human pride or cunning driv'n
 To misery's brink
 Till wrench'd of ev'ry stay but Heav'n,
 He rum'd sink !

bield] shelter

hystie] dry barren

Ev'n thou who mourn'st the Daisy's fate,
That fate is thine—no distant date ;
Stern Ruin's ploughshare drives elate
Full on thy bloom,
Till crush'd beneath the furrow's weight
Shall be thy doom !

There was a Lad.

Written ?1786.—Published *Reliques* (Cromek), 1808

THERE was a lad was born in Kyle,
 But whatna day o' whatna style
 I doubt it's hardly worth the while
 To be sae nice wi' Robin.

Robin was a rovin' boy,
Rantin' rovin', rantin' rovin' ;
Robin was a rovin' boy,
Rantin' rovin' Robin.

Our monarch's hindmost year but ane
Was five-and-twenty days begun,
'Twas then a blast o' Janwar win'
Blew hansel in on Robin.

The gossip keekit in his loof,
Quo' scho, Wha lives will see the proof,
This waly boy will be nae coof,
I think we'll ca' him Robin.

He'll hae misfortunes great and sma',
But aye a heart aboon them a' ;
He'll be a credit till us a',
We'll a' be proud o' Robin.

whatna] what (implying contempt for the answer expected)
hansel] the first gift keekit] peeped, looked loof] palm
waly] choice, big coof] dolt till] to

But sure as three times three mak nine,
 I see by ilka score and line
 This chap will dearly like our kin'
 So leeze me on thee, Robin
 Guid faith quo' scho I doubt you Sir,
 Ye gar the lasses lie aspar
 But twenty fauts ye may hae waur,
 So blessings on thee Robin!

Address to the Unco Guid,
 or the Rigidly Righteous

Written 1786 — Published *Poems* (Edinburgh) 1787

O YE wha are sae guid yoursel,
 Sae pious and sae holy,
 Ye ve nought to do but mark and tell
 Your neibour's fauts and folly!
 Whase life is like a weel-gaun mill,
 Supplied wi' store o' water
 The heapet happer's ebbing still
 And still the clap plays clatter
 Hear me ye venerable core
 As counsel for poor mortals
 That frequent pass douch Wisdom's door
 For glaukit Folly's portals
 I for their thoughtless careless sakes,
 Would here propone defences —
 Their dousie tricks their black mistakes
 Their failings and mischances

10

leeze me on] blessings on
 weel gaun] well going core] corps company douch] sober
 glaukit] giddy propone] put forward dousie] unlucky
 dangerous

Ye see your state wi' their's compar'd,
 And shudder at the niffer ;
 But cast a moment's fair regard—
 What maks the mighty differ? 20
 Discount what scant occasion gave,
 That purity ye pride in,
 And (what 's aft mair than a' the lave)
 Your better art o' hidin'.
 Think, when your castigated pulse
 Gies now and then a wallop,
 What ragings must his veins convulse,
 That still eternal gallop !
 Wi' wind and tide fair i' your tail,
 Right on ye scud your sea-way ; 30
 But in the teeth o' baith to sail,
 It maks an unco leeway.
 See Social-life and Glee sit down,
 All joyous and unthinking,
 Till, quite transmugrified, they're grown
 Debauchery and Drinking :
 O would they stay to calculate
 Th' eternal consequences ;
 Or your more dreaded hell to state,
 Damnation of expenses ! 40
 Ye high, exalted, virtuous Dames,
 Tied up in godly laces,
 Before ye gie poor Frailty names,
 Suppose a change o' cases ;
 A dear-lov'd lad, convenience snug,
 A treach'rous inclination—
 But, let me whisper i' your lug,
 Ye're aiblins nae temptation.

niffer] exchange
 metamorphosed

unco] strange, amazing
 aiblins] perhaps

transmugrified]

Then gently scan your brother man,
 Still gentler sister woman , 50
 Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang
 To step aside is human
 One point must still be greatly dark
 The moving why they do it ,
 And just as lamely can ye mark
 How far perhaps they rue it
 Who made the heart 'tis He alone
 Decidedly can try us
 He knows each chord its various tone
 Each spring its various bias 60
 Then at the balance let 's be mute
 We never can adjust it
 What 's done we partly may compute,
 But know not what 's resisted

The Gloomy Night is gathering fast

Written 1786 —Published *Poems* (Edinburgh) 1787

THE gloomy night is gathering fast,
 Loud roars the wild inconstant blast,
 Yon murky cloud is foul with rain
 I see it driving o'er the plain
 The hunter now has left the moor
 The scatter'd coveys meet secure,
 While here I wander, prest with care,
 Along the lonely banks of Ayr
 The Autumn mourns her ripening corn
 By early Winter's ravage torn , 10
 Across her placid azure sky,
 She sees the scowling tempest fly
 a kennin] a little (just enough to be kenned)

Chill runs my blood to hear it rave,
 I think upon the stormy wave,
 Where many a danger I must dare,
 Far from the bonnie banks of Ayr.

'Tis not the surging billow's roar,
 'Tis not that fatal, deadly shore ;
 Tho' death in ev'ry shape appear,
 The wretched have no more to fear : 20
 But round my heart the ties are bound,
 That heart transpierc'd with many a wound :
 These bleed afresh, those ties I tear,
 To leave the bonnie banks of Ayr.

Farewell, old Coila's hills and dales,
 Her heathy moors and winding vales ;
 The scenes where wretched fancy roves,
 Pursuing past unhappy loves !
 Farewell, my friends ! Farewell, my foes !
 My peace with these, my love with those ; 30
 The bursting tears my heart declare,
 Farewell, the bonnie banks of Ayr !

Lines on meeting with Lord Daer

Written October 1786.—Published *Works* (ed. Currie), 1800

THIS wot ye all whom it concerns,
 I, Rhymer Robin, alias Burns,
 October twenty-third,
 A ne'er to be forgotten day,
 Sae far I sprachled up the brae,
 I dinner'd wi' a Lord.

sprachled] clambered

I've been at drucken writers' feasts
 Nay, been bitch-fou' mang' godly priests
 Wi' reverence be it spoken,
 I've even join'd the honour'd jorum 10
 When mighty Squireships of the quorum
 Their hydra-drouth did sloken

But wi' a Lord—stand out my shin
 A Lord—a Peer—an Earl's son
 Up higher yet my bonnet!
 And sic a Lord!—lang Scotch ell's twa
 Our Peerage he o'erlooks them a
 As I look o'er my sonnet

But O for Hogarth's magic power!
 To show Sir Bardie's willyart glow'r, 20
 And how he star'd and stammer'd
 When goavin' as illed wi' branks
 An' stumpin' on his ploughman shanks
 He in the parlour hammer'd.

I sidling shelter'd in a nook
 An' at his Lordship steal'd a look
 Like some portentous omen
 Except good sense and social glee
 An' (what surprised me) modesty
 I mark'd nought uncommon 30

I watch'd the symptoms o' the Great
 The gentle pride, the lordly state,
 The arrogant assuming
 The fient a pride nae pride had he
 Nor sauce nor state that I could see
 Mair than an honest ploughman

writers'] lawyers bitch-fou'] very drunk drouth'] thirst
 sloken'] quench willyart glow'r'] bewildered stare goavin']
 looking aimlessly about branks'] a wooden curb

Then from his lordship I shall learn
 Henceforth to meet with unconcern
 One rank as well 's another ;
 Nae honest worthy man need care
 To meet with noble youthful Daer,
 For he but meets a brother.

40

Macpherson's Farewell

Written 1788 —Published *Scots Musical Museum*, ii, 1788

FAREWELL, ye dungeons dark and strong,
 The wretch's destinie :
 Macpherson's time will not be long
 On yonder gallows-tree.

Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,
 Sae dauntingly gaed he ;
 He played a spring and danced it round,
 Below the gallows-tree.

Oh, what is death but parting breath?
 On many a bloody plain
 I've dared his face, and in this place
 I scorn him yet again !

10

Untie these bands from off my hands,
 And bring to me my sword,
 And there 's no a man in all Scotland,
 But I'll brave him at a word.

I've lived a life of sturt and strife ;
 I die by treacherie :
 It burns my heart I must depart
 And not avengèd be.

20

rantingly] jovially spring] dance-tune sturt] trouble

Now farewell light thou sunshine bright,
 And all beneath the sky I
 May coward shame disdain his name,
 The wretch that dares not die I

Of a' the Airts

Written 1788 — Published *Scots Musical Museum* in 1790

Of a the airts the wind can blaw,
 I dearly like the west
 For there the bonnie lassie lives
 The lassie I lo'e best
 There's wild woods grow, and rivers row
 And mony a hull between,
 But day and night my fancy's flight
 Is ever wi' my Jean
 I see her in the dewy flowers,
 I see her sweet and fair
 I hear her in the tunefu' birds
 I hear her charm the air
 There's not a bonnie flower that springs
 By fountain shaw, or green,
 There's not a bonnie bird that sings
 But minds me o' my Jean

10

Go fetch to me a Pint o' Wine

Written 1788 — Published *Scots Musical Museum* in 1790

Go fetch to me a pint o' wine
 And fill it in a silver tassie,
 That I may drink before I go,
 A service to my bonnie lassie

airts] regions of the earth or sky (= directions)
 haw] cope
 tassie] goblet

row] roll

The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith,
 Fu' loud the wind blows frae the ferry,
 The ship rides by the Berwick-law,
 And I maun leave my bonnie Mary.

The trumpets sound, the banners fly,
 The glittering spears are rankèd ready ; 10
 The shouts o' war are heard afar,
 The battle closes thick and bloody ;
 But it's not the roar o' sea or shore
 Wad make me langer wish to tarry ;
 Nor shouts o' war that 's heard afar,
 It's leaving thee, my bonnie Mary.

Auld Lang Syne

Written 1788.—Published *Scots Musical Museum*, v, 1796

SHOULD auld acquaintance be forgot,
 And never brought to mind ?
 Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
 And auld lang syne ?

For auld lang syne, my dear.
 For auld lang syne,
 We'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
 For auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be your pint-stowp,
 And surely I'll be mine ; 10
 And we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet
 For auld lang syne.

We twa hae run about the braes
 And pu'd the gowans fine,
 But we've wander'd mony a weary fit
 Sin' auld lang syne

We twa hae paidl'd in the burn
 From morning sun till dine,
 But seas between us braid hae roar'd
 Sin' auld lang syne

20

And there's a hand my trusty fiere,
 And gie's a hand o' thine,
 And we'll tak a right guid willie waught,
 For auld lang syne

John Anderson, my jo

Written 1789—Published Scots Musical Museum iii 1790

JOHN ANDERSON my jo John
 When we were first acquaint
 Your locks were like the raven
 Your bonnie brow was brent
 But now your brow is beld John,
 Your locks are like the snaw,
 But blessings on your frosty pow,
 John Anderson my jo

John Anderson my jo John
 We clamb the hill thegither
 And mony a canty day John
 We've had wi' ane anither

10

fit] foot	padl'd] paddled	dine] dinner time	fiere]
companion	guid willie waught]	hearty draught	
jo] sweetheart	brent] smooth and straight	beld] bold	
pow] head	canty] merry		

Now we maun totter down, John,
 And hand in hand we'll go,
 And sleep thegither at the foot,
 John Anderson, my jo.

T a m G l e n

Written ?1789.—Published *Scots Musical Museum*, iii, 1790

My heart is a breaking, dear Tittie,
 Some counsel unto me come len',
 To anger them a' is a pity ;
 But what will I do wi' Tam Glen ?

I'm thinking, wi' sic a braw fellow,
 In poortith I might mak a fen' ;
 What care I in riches to wallow,
 If I mauna marry Tam Glen ?

There 's Lowrie the laird o' Dumeller,
 ' Guid-day to you ', brute ! he comes ben : 10
 He brags and he blaws o' his siller,
 But when will he dance like Tam Glen ?

My minnie does constantly deave me,
 And bids me beware o' young men ;
 They flatter, she says, to deceive me ;
 But wha can think sae o' Tam Glen ?

My daddie says, gin I'll forsake him,
 He'll gie me guid hunder marks ten :
 But, if it 's ordain'd I maun take him,
 O wha will I get but Tam Glen ? 20

Tittie] sister poortith] poverty fen'] shift minnie]
 mother deave] deafen (with talk)

Yestreen at the Valentines' dealing,
 My heart to my mou gied a sten
 For thrice I drew ane without failing
 And thrice it was written, Tam Glen

The last Halloween I was waukin'
 My dronkit sark sleeve as ye ken,
 His likeness cam up the house staukin'—
 And the very grey breeks o' Tam Glen!

Come counsel, dear Tittie, don't tarry,
 I'll gie you my bonnie black hen, 30
 Gif ye will advise me to marry
 The lad I lo'e dearly, Tam Glen

Willie brewed a Peck o' Maut

Written 1789—Published *Scots Musical Museum* iii 1790

O WILLIE brew'd a peck o' maut,
 And Rob and Allan cam to see
 Three blyther hearts, that lee-lang night,
 Ye wad na found in Christendie

We are na fou we're nae that fou
 But just a drappie in our ee,
 The cock may *craw*, the day may *daw*,
 And aye we'll taste the barley bree

Here are we met three merry boys,
 Three merry boys I trow, are we, 10
 And mony a night we've merry been
 And mony mae we hope to be!

gied a sten] leapt waukin'] awake watching dronkit] soaked
 maut] malt fou] drunk daw] dawn bree] brew

It is the moon, I ken her horn,
 That 's blinkin' in the lift sae hie ;
 She shines sae bright to wyle us hame,
 But, by my sooth ! she'll wait a wee.

Wha first shall rise to gang awa,
 A cuckold, coward loun is he !
 Wha first beside his chair shall fa',
 He is the King amang us three !

20

To Mary in Heaven

Written 1789 —Published *Scots Musical Museum*, iii, 1790

THOU lingering star, with lessening ray,
 That lov'st to greet the early morn,
 Again thou usherest in the day
 My Mary from my soul was torn.
 O Mary ! dear departed shade !
 Where is thy place of blissful rest ?
 Seest thou thy lover lowly laid ?
 Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast ?

That sacred hour can I forget ?
 Can I forget the hallow'd grove,
 Where by the winding Ayr we met,
 To live one day of parting love ?
 Eternity will not efface
 Those records dear of transports past ;
 Thy image at our last embrace—
 Ah ! little thought we 'twas our last !

10

blinkin'] shining lift] sky gang awa] go away (= go home)
 loun] rascal

Ayr gurgling kiss'd his pebbled shore
 O'erhung with wild woods thickening green
 The fragrant birch and hawthorn hoar
 Twin'd amorous round the raptur'd scene 10
 The flowers sprang wanton to be prest
 The birds sang love on ev'ry spray,
 Till too too soon the glowing west
 Proclaim'd the speed of wing'd day
 Still o'er these scenes my memory wakes
 And fondly broods with miser care!
 Time but the impression deeper makes
 As streams their channels deeper wear
 My Mary dear departed shade!
 Where is thy blissful place of rest? 20
 Seest thou thy lover lowly laid?
 Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?

Tam o' Shanter,

Written 1790-1 — Published *Edinburgh Herald* 18 March 1791
 and *Edinburgh Magazine* March 1791

WHEN Chapman billies leave the street
 And drouthy neighbors neighbors meet
 As market-days are wearing late
 And folk begin to tak the gate
 While we sit bousing at the nappy
 An' getting fou and unco happy
 We think na on the lang Scots mules,
 The mosses waters slaps and styles
 That lie between us and our hame
 Where sits our sulky sullen dame, 10

billies] fellows drouthy] thirsty gate] way (home)
 nappy] ale slaps] gaps in a fence

Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,
As he frae Ayr ae night did canter—
(Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses
For honest men and bonnie lasses).

O Tam ! hadst thou but been sae wise
As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice !
She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,
A bletherin', blusterin', drunken blellum ; 20
That frae November till October,
Ae market-day thou was na sober ;
That ilka melder wi' the miller
Thou sat as lang as thou had siller ;
That every naig was ca'd a shoe on,
The smith and thee gat roarin' fou on ;
That at the Lord's house, even on Sunday,
Thou drank wi' Kirkton Jean till Monday.
She prophesied that, late or soon,
Thou would be found deep drown'd in Doon ; 30
Or catch'd wi' warlocks in the mirk
By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.

Ah, gentle dames ! it gars me greet
To think how mony counsels sweet,
How mony lengthen'd sage advices,
The husband frae the wife despises !

But to our tale : Ae market night,
Tam had got planted unco right,
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely ; 40

skellum]	good-for-nothing	bletherin']	idle-talking	blellum]
babbler	melder]	load of corn sent to be ground	naig]	horse
ca'd a shoe on]	shod	gars me greet]	makes me weep	reaming
swats]	frothing ale			

And at his elbow, Souther Johnny,
 His ancient trusty drouthy crony,
 Tam lo'ed him like a very brither
 They had been fou for weeks thegither
 The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter
 And aye the ale was growing better
 The landlady and Tam grew gracious
 Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious,
 The souter tauld his queerest stories,
 The landlord's laugh was ready chorus
 The storm without might rair and rustle
 Tam did na mind the storm a whistle

50

Care mad to see a man sae happy,
I en drown'd himsel amang the nappy
 As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure
 The minutes wing'd their way wi' pleasure,
 Kings may be blest but Tam was glorious
 O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread—
 You seize the flow'r its bloom is shed
 Or like the snow falls in the river—
 A moment white then melts for ever,
 Or like the borealis race
 That flit ere you can point their place,
 Or like the rainbow's lovely form
 Evanishing amid the storm
 Nae man can tether time or tide
 The hour approaches Tam maun ride
 That hour o' night's black arch the key-stane
 That dreary hour he mounts his beast in,
 And sic a night he takes the road in
 As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in

60

70

The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last ;
 The rattling show'rs rose on the blast ;
 The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd ,
 Loud, deep, and lang, the thunder bellow'd :
 That night, a child might understand,
 The Deil had business on his hand.

Weel mounted on his gray mare, Meg,
 A better never lifted leg, 80
 Tam skelpit on thro' dub and mire,
 Despising wind, and rain, and fire ;
 Whiles holding fast his gude blue bonnet ;
 Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet ;
 Whiles glow'ring round wi' prudent cares,
 Lest bogles catch him unawares.
 Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
 Whare ghaists and houlets nightly cry.

By this time he was cross the ford,
 Whare in the snaw the chapman smoor'd ; 90
 And past the birks and meikle stane,
 Whare drunken Charlie brak 's neck-bane ;
 And thro' the whins, and by the cairn,
 Whare hunters fand the murder'd bairn ;
 And near the thorn, aboon the well,
 Whare Mungo's mither hang'd hersel.
 Before him Doon pours all his floods ;
 The doubling storm roars thro' the woods ;
 The lightnings flash from pole to pole ;
 Near and more near the thunders roll : 100
 When, glimmering thro' the groaning trees,
 Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze ;
 Thro' ilka bore the beams were glancing ;
 And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

skelpit] pounded
 smoor'd] smothered

crooning] humming
 birks] birches

houlets] owls
 whins] furze

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn !
 What dangers thou canst make us scorn !
 Wi' tippenny, we fear nae evil
 Wi' usquabae we'll face the devil !
 The swats sat ream'd in Tamme's noddle
 Fair play he car'd na deils a boddle ! 110
 But Maggie stood right sair astonish'd
 Till by the heel and hand admonish'd
 She ventur'd forward on the light
 And now ! Tam saw an unco sight !
 Warlocks and witches in a dance !
 Nae cotillon brent new frae France
 But hornpipes jig* *trathspeys and reels,
 Put life and mettle in their heels
 A winnock bunker in the east,
 There sat auld Nick in a hape o' beast— 120
 A touzie tyke black grim, and large !
 To gie them music was his charge
 He screw'd the pipes and gart them skirl
 Till roof and rafters a' did dirl
 Coffins stood round like open presses,
 That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses
 And by some devilish cantraip sleight
 Each in its cauld hand held a light
 By which heroic Tam was able
 To note upon the haly table 130
 A murderer's bane in gibbet airns
 Twa span lang wee unchristen'd bairns
 A thief new cutt'd frae a rape—
 Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape

tippenny]	twopenny (ale)	usquabae]	whisky	car'd
boddle]	cared not a farthing for	deils	unco]	strange
brand	winnock bunker]	window seat	skirl]	scream
vibrate	cantraip]	magic	airns]	iron
mouth			rape]	rope
				gab]

Five tomahawks, wi' blude red-rusted ;
 Five scymitars, wi' murder crusted ;
 A garter, which a babe had strangled ;
 A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
 Whom his ain son o' life bereft—
 The gray hairs yet stack to the heft ; 140
 Wi' mair of horrible and awefu',
 Which even to name wad be unlawfu'.

As Tammie glowr'd, amaz'd, and curious,
 The mirth and fun grew fast and furious :
 The piper loud and louder blew ;
 The dancers quick and quicker flew ;
 They reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,
 Till ilka carlin swat and reekit,
 And coost her duddies to the wark,
 And linkit at it in her sark ! 150

Now Tam, O Tam ! had thae been queans,
 A' plump and strapping in their teens ;
 Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen,
 Been snaw-white seventeen hunder linen !
 Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
 That ance were plush, o' gude blue hair,
 I wad hae gi'en them off my hurdies,
 For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies !

But wither'd beldams, auld and droll,
 Rigwoodie hags wad spean a foal, 160
 Louping and flinging on a crummock,
 I wonder didna turn thy stomach.

heft] haft cleekit] linked arms carlin] witch coost her
 duddies] cast off her rags linkit] went at top speed sark]
 shirt queans] young women creeshie flannen] greasy flannel
 seventeen hunder] woven in a reed of 1,700 divisions (= very fine)
 thir breeks] these breeches hurdies] buttocks blink] glance
 burdies] girls rigwoodie] withered, lean spean] wean (by
 disgust) crummock] crooked-staff

But Tam kend what was what fu' brawlie
 There was ae winsome wench and wawlie
 That night enlisted in the core
 Lang after kend on Carnick shore !
 (For mony a beast to dead she shot
 And perash'd mony a bonnie boat
 And shook baith meikle corn and bear,
 And kept the country side in fear)
 Her cutty sark, o' Pausley harn
 That while a lassie she had worn,
 In longitude tho' sorely scanty,
 It was her best, and she was vauntie --
 Ah ! little kend thy reverend grannie
 That sark she coft for her wee Nannie
 Wi' twa pund Scots ('twas a' her riches)
 Wad ever grac'd a dance of witches !

170

But here my Muse her wing maun cour ,
 Sic flights are far beyond her pow'r --
 To sing how Nannie lap and flang
 (A souple jade she was and strang)
 And how Tam stood like ane bewitch'd,
 And thought his very een enrich'd ,
 Even Satan glowr'd, and fidg'd fu' fain
 And hotch'd and blew wi' might and main
 Till first ae caper syne anither
 Tam tint his reason a' thegither
 And roars out 'Weel done Cutty sark !'
 And in an instant all was dark !
 And scarcely had he Maggie rallied
 When out the hellish legion sallied

180

190

brawlie] well	wawlie] large	plump	core] corps	company
bear] barley	cutty] short	harn] coarse cloth	vauntie] in	
high spirits	coft] bought	souple] supple	fidg'd] fidgeted	
hotch'd] jerked	tint] lost			

As bees bizz out wi' angry fyke
 When plundering herds assail their byke,
 As open pussie's mortal foes
 When pop ! she starts before their nose,
 As eager runs the market-crowd,
 When ' Catch the thief ! ' resounds aloud,
 So Maggie runs ; the witches follow,
 Wi' mony an eldritch skrie and hollow. 200

Ah, Tam ! ah, Tam ! thou'll get thy fairin' !
 In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin' !
 In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin' !
 Kate soon will be a woefu' woman !
 Now do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
 And win the key-stane of the brig :
 There at them thou thy tail may toss,
 A running stream they darena cross.
 But ere the key-stane she could make,
 The fient a tail she had to shake ! 210
 For Nannie, far before the rest,
 Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
 And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle ;
 But little wist she Maggie's mettle !
 Ae spring brought off her master hale,
 But left behind her ain gray tail :
 The carlin claught her by the rump,
 And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.

Now, wha this tale o' truth shall read,
 Ilk man and mother's son, take heed ; 220
 Whene'er to drink you are inclin'd,
 Or cutty-sarks run in your mind,
 Think ! ye may buy the joys o'er dear ;
 Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.

fyke] fret herds] herd-boys byke] hive pussie's] the
 hare's skrie] screech ettle] purpose claught] clutched

Ye Flowery Banks

Written 1791 —Published *Récliques* (Cromek) 1803

YE flowery banks o' bonnie Doon
How can ye blume sae fair?
How can ye chant ye little birds
And I sae fu o' care?

Thou'll break my heart thou bonnie bird,
That sings upon the bough,
Thou mends me o' the happy days
When my fause luvie was true

Thou'll break my heart thou bonnie bird,
That sings beside thy mate
For sae I sat and sae I sang
And wist na o' my fate

10

Aft hae I rov'd by bonnie Doon
To see the wood bine twine
And ilka bird sang o' its love
And sae did I o' mine

Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose
Frae aff its thorny tree
And my fause luvie staw the rose
But left the thorn wi' me

20

Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon

Written 1791 —Published *Scots Musical Museum* iv 1792

YE banks and braes o' bonnie Doon
How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair?
How can ye chant ye little birds
And I sae weary fu o' care?

staw] stole

Thou'lt break my heart, thou warbling bird,
 That wantons thro' the flowering thorn :
 Thou minds me o' departed joys,
 Departed never to return.

Aft hae I rov'd by bonnie Doon,
 To see the rose and woodbine twine ; 10
 And ilka bird sang o' its love,
 And fondly sae did I o' mine.
 Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose,
 Fu' sweet upon its thorny tree ;
 And my fause lover stole my rose,
 But ah ! he left the thorn wi' me.

Bonnie Wee Thing

Written ?1791.—Published *Scots Musical Museum*, iv, 1792

BONNIE wee thing, cannie wee thing,
 Lovely wee thing, wert thou mine,
 I wad wear thee in my bosom,
 Lest my jewel it should tine.

Wishfully I look and languish
 In that bonnie face o' thine ;
 And my heart it stounds wi' anguish,
 Lest my wee thing be na mine.

Wit, and grace, and love, and beauty,
 In ae constellation shine , 10
 To adore thee is my duty,
 Goddess o' this soul o' mine !

Ae fond Kiss

Written 1791 —Published Scots Musical Museum iv 1792

Ae fond kiss and then we sever !
 Ae fareweel and then for ever !
 Deep in heart wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
 Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee
 Who shall say that fortune grieves him
 While the star of hope she leaves him ?
 Me nae cheerfu' twink'le lights me
 Dark despair around benights me

I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy,
 Naething could resist my Nancy ,
 But to see her was to love her
 Love but her and love for ever
 Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
 Had we never lov'd sae blindly
 Never met—or never parted,
 We had ne'er been broken hearted

10

Fare thee weel thou first and fairest !
 Fare thee weel thou best and dearest !
 Thine be ilka joy and treasure,
 Peace, enjoyment love, and pleasure
 Ae fond kiss and then we sever
 Ae fareweel, alas for ever !
 Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee
 Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee

20

Bonnie Lesley

Written 1792.—Published *Select Scottish Airs*, 1. ii, 1798

O SAW ye bonnie Lesley
 As she gaed o'er the border?
 She's gane, like Alexander,
 To spread her conquests farther.

To see her is to love her,
 And love but her for ever;
 For Nature made her what she is,
 And never made anither!

Thou art a queen, fair Lesley,
 Thy subjects we, before thee: 10
 Thou art divine, fair Lesley,
 The hearts o' men adore thee.

The Deil he could na scaith thee,
 Or aught that wad belang thee;
 He'd look into thy bonnie face,
 And say, 'I canna wrang thee.'

The Powers aboon will tent thee;
 Misfortune sha'na steer thee;
 Thou'rt like themsel' sae lovely,
 That ill they'll ne'er let near thee. 20

Return again, fair Lesley,
 Return to Caledonie!
 That we may brag we hae a lass
 There's nane again sae bonnie.

scaith] harm

tent] take care of

steer] molest

Highland Mary

Written 1790. —Published *Select Scottish Airs* 11 1799

YE banks and braes and streams around
 The castle o' Montgomery,
 Green be your woods and fair your flowers,
 Your waters never drumlie !
 There simmer first unfauld her robes
 And there the langest tarry
 For there I took the last fareweel
 O my sweet Highland Mary

How sweetly bloom'd the gay green birk,

10

How rich the hawthorn's blossom
 As underneath their fragrant shade
 I clasp'd her to my bosom !

The golden hours on angel wings
 Flew o'er me and my dearie ,
 For dear to me as light and life
 Was my sweet Highland Mary

Wi' mony a vow and lock'd embrace,
 Our parting was fu' tender ,
 And pledging afit to meet again,

20

We tore oursel's asunder
 But oh ! fell death's untimely frost
 That nipt my flower sae early !

Now green's the sod and cauld's the clay,
 That wraps my Highland Mary !

O pale pale now, those rosy lips,
 I afit have kiss'd sae fondly !

And closed for aye the sparkling glance
 That dwelt on me sae kindly !

drumlie] turbid

And mould'ring now in silent dust,
 That heart that lo'ed me dearly ! 30
 But still within my bosom's core
 Shall live my Highland Mary.

Duncan Gray

Written 1792 —Published *Select Scottish Airs*, I. ii, 1798

DUNCAN GRAY came here to woo,
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't,
 On blythe Yule-night when we were fou,
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.
 Maggie coost her head fu' high,
 Look'd asklent and unco skiegh,
 Gart poor Duncan stand abiegh ;
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

Duncan fleech'd, and Duncan pray'd ;
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't, 10
 Meg was deaf as Ailsa Craig,
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.
 Duncan sigh'd baith out and in,
 Grat his een baith bleer't and blin',
 Spak o' lowpin o'er a linn ;
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't.

Time and chance are but a tide,
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't,
 Slighted love is sair to bide,
 Ha, ha, the wooing o't. 20

coost] tossed asklent] askance skiegh] disdainful abiegh]
 aloof fleech'd] wheedled grat] wept lowpin] leaping
 (throwing himself) linn] waterfall

Shall I like a fool, quoth he
 For a haughty hizzie die?
 She may gae to—France for me!
 Ha ha the wooing o't

How it comes let doctors tell,
 Ha, ha the wooing o't,
 Meg grew sick as he grew hault
 Ha ha, the wooing o't
 Something in her bosom wrings
 For relief a sigh she brings, 30
 And O her een they spak sic things!
 Ha ha, the wooing o't

Duncan was a lad o' grace,
 Ha ha the wooing o't,
 Maggie's was a piteous case,
 Ha ha the wooing o't
 Duncan couldna be her death
 Swelling pity smoor'd his wrath
 Now they re crouse and cantie baith!
 Ha ha the wooing o't 40

Braw Lads o' Gala Water

Written 1792-3—Published *Select Scottish Airs* 1: 1793

BRAW braw lads on Yarrow braes
 They rove amang the blooming heather,
 But Yarrow braes nor Etrick shaws
 Can match the lads o' Gala Water

hizzie] hussy hault] whole smoor'd] smothered crouse]
 proud cantie] happy
 shaws] copses

But there is ane, a secret ane,
 Aboon them a' I lo'e him better ;
 And I'll be his, and he'll be mine,
 The bonnie lad o' Gala Water.

Altho' his daddie was nae laird,
 And tho' I hae nae meikle tocher, 10
 Yet rich in kindest, truest love,
 We'll tent our flocks by Gala Water.

It ne'er was wealth, it ne'er was wealth,
 That coft contentment, peace or pleasure ;
 The bands and bliss o' mutual love,
 O that 's the chiefest warld's treasure !

Lord Gregory

Written 1793 —Published *Select Scottish Airs*, 1. ii, 1798

O MIRK, mirk is this midnight hour,
 And loud the tempest's roar ;
 A waefu' wanderer seeks thy tow'r,
 Lord Gregory, ope thy door.

An exile frae her father's ha',
 And a' for loving thee ;
 At least some pity on me shaw,
 If love it mayna be.

Lord Gregory, mind'st thou not the grove,
 By bonnie Irwine side, 10
 Where first I own'd that virgin love
 I lang lang had denied ?

tocher] dowry

tent] tend

coft] purchased

How aften didst thou pledge and vow
Thou wad for aye be mine !

And my fond heart itsel sae true
It ne er mistrusted thine

Hard is thy heart, Lord Gregory
And flinty is thy breast

Thou bolt of heaven that flashest by
O wilt thou give me rest !

20

Ye mustering thunders from above
Your willing victim see !

But spare and pardon my fause love
His wrangs to heaven and me !

Whistle, and I'll come to you, my Lad

Written 1793 — Published *Select Scottish Airs* 11 1799

O WHISTLE and I'll come to you my lad
O whistle and I'll come to you my lad
Tho father and mither and a should gae mad
O whistle and I'll come to you my lad

But warily tent when ye come to court me,
And come na unless the back-yett be a jee
Syne up the back-stile and let naeboddy see
And come as ye were na comin to me
And come as ye were na comin to me

At kirk or at market whene'er ye meet me
Gang by rie as tho that ye car'd na a flet
But steal me a blink o' your bonnie black ee,
Yet look as ye were na lookin at me
Yet look as ye were na lookin at me

10

tent] heed yett] gate a jee] ajar flet] fly blink] glance

Aye vow and protest that ye care na for me,
 And whiles ye may lightly my beauty a wee ;
 But court na anither, tho' jokin' ye be,
 For fear that she wyle your fancy frae me.
 For fear that she wyle your fancy frae me.

Scots wha hae

ROBERT BRUCE'S ADDRESS TO HIS ARMY, BEFORE
 THE BATTLE OF BANNOCKBURN.

Written 1793 —Published *Morning Chronicle*, 8 May 1794

Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,
 Scots, wham Bruce has aften led,
 Welcome to your gory bed,
 Or to victorie.

Now 's the day, and now 's the hour ;
 See the front o' battle lour !
 See approach proud Edward's power—
 Chains and slaverie !

Wha will be a traitor knave ?
 Wha can fill a coward's grave ?
 Wha sae base as be a slave ?
 Let him turn and flee !

10

Wha for Scotland's King and law
 Freedom's sword will strongly draw,
 Freeman stand, or freeman fa' ?
 Let him follow me !

lightly] disparage

By oppression's woes and pains !
 By your sons in servile chains !
 We will drain our dearest veins,
 But they shall be free !

20

Lay the proud usurpers low !
 Tyrants fall in every foe !
 Liberty's in every blow !
 Let us do or die !

My Love is like a Red Red Rose

Written 1794 — Published *Scots Musical Museum* v 1796

My love is like a red red rose
 That's newly sprung in June
 My love is like the melody
 That's sweetly play'd in tune

As fair art thou my bonnie lass,
 So deep in love am I
 And I will love thee still my dear,
 Till a' the seas gang dry

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear
 And the rocks melt wi' the sun
 And I will love thee still my dear,
 While the sands o' life shall run

10

And fare thee weel my only love,
 And fare thee weel a while !
 And I will come again my love
 Tho' it were ten thousand mile

Ca' the Yowes

Written 1794.—Published *Works* (ed. Currie), 1800

Ca' the yowes to the knowes,
Ca' them where the heather grows,
Ca' them where the burnie rows,
My bonnie dearie.

Hark ! the mavis' evening sang
Sounding Clouden's woods amang ;
Then a-faulding let us gang,
My bonnie dearie.

We'll gae down by Clouden side,
Thro' the hazels spreading wide
O'er the waves that sweetly glide
To the moon sae clearly.

10

Yonder Clouden's silent towers,
Where at moonshine midnight hours,
O'er the dewy bending flowers,
Fairies dance sae cheery.

Ghaist nor bogle shalt thou fear ;
Thou'rt to love and Heaven sae dear,
Nocht of ill may come thee near,
My bonnie dearie.

20

Fair and lovely as thou art,
Thou hast stown my very heart ;
I can die—but canna part,
My bonnie dearie.

ca'] drive
stolen

yowes] ewes

a-faulding] a-folding

stown]

Contented wi' Little

Written 1704 — Published *Select Scottish Airs* in 1799

CONTENTED wi' little and cantie wi' mair
 Whene'er I forgather wi' sorrow and care
 I gie them a skelp as they're creepin' along
 Wi' a cog o' gude swats and an auld Scottish sang
 I whyles claw the elbow o' troublesome thought
 But man is a soger and life is a faught
 My mirth and gude humour are coin in my pouch
 And my freedom's my lairdship nae monarch dare touch
 A towmond o' trouble should that be my fa',
 A night o' gude fellowship sowthers it a 10
 When at the blythe end of our journey at last,
 Wha the deil ever thinks o' the road he has past?
 Blind Chance let her snapper and stoyte on her way
 Be t to me be t frae me — en let the jad gae
 Come ease or come travail come pleasure or pain
 My warst word is— Welcome and welcome again !'

For a' that and a' that

Written 1795 — Published *Glasgow Magazine* August 1795

Is there for honest poverty
 That hangs his head and a' that?
 The coward slave we pass him by
 We dare be poor for a' that !

skelp] slap cog] wooden bowl swats] new ale claw]
 scratch towmond] twelve month fa'] lot sowthers] soldiers
 snapper] stumble stoyte] stagger

For a' that, and a' that,
 Our toils obscure, and a' that ;
 The rank is but the guinea's stamp ;
 The man 's the gowd for a' that.

What tho' on hamely fare we dine,
 Wear hodden-gray, and a' that ; 10
 Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine,
 A man 's a man for a' that.
 For a' that, and a' that,
 Their tinsel show, and a' that ;
 The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
 Is King o' men for a' that.

Ye see yon birkie, ca'd a lord,
 Wha struts, and stares, and a' that ;
 Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
 He 's but a coof for a' that : 20
 For a' that, and a' that,
 His riband, star, and a' that,
 The man of independent mind,
 He looks and laughs at a' that.

A prince can mak a belted knight,
 A marquis, duke, and a' that ;
 But an honest man 's aboon his might,
 Guid faith he mauna fa' that !
 For a' that, and a' that,
 Their dignities, and a' that, 30
 The pith o' sense, and pride o' worth,
 Are higher rank than a' that.

gowd] gold hodden-gray] undyed homespun birkie] smart
 fellow coof] dolt fa'] lay claim to

Then let us pray that come it may
 As come it will for a' that
 That sense and worth o'er a' the earth,
 May bear the gree and a' that
 For a' that and a' that
 It s coming yet for a' that
 That man to man the world o'er
 Shall brithers be for a' that

40

O, Wert Thou in the Cauld Blast

Written 1790 — Published *Works* (ed. Currie) 1800

O WERT thou in the cauld blast
 On yonder lea on yonder lea,
 My plaidie to the angry airt,
 I'd shelter thee I'd shelter thee
 Or did misfortune's bitter storms
 Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,
 Thy bield should be my bosom
 To share it a', to share it a'

Or were I in the wildest waste
 Sae black and bare, sae black and bare
 The desert were a paradise
 If thou wert there if thou wert there
 Or were I monarch o' the globe,
 Wi' thee to reign wi' thee to reign
 The brightest jewel in my crown
 Wad be my queen wad be my queen

10

bear the gree] win the prize
 airt] region of the sky bield] shelter

Preface to First (Kilmarnock) Edition of the Poems, 1786

THE following trifles are not the production of the Poet, who, with all the advantages of learned art, and perhaps amid the elegances and idlenesses of upper life, looks down for a rural theme, with an eye to Theocrites or Virgil. To the Author of this, these and other celebrated names their countrymen are, in their original languages, 'A fountain shut up, and a book sealed'. Unacquainted with the necessary requisites for commencing Poet by rule, he sings the sentiments and manners, he felt and saw in himself and his rustic compeers around him, in his and their native lan- 10 guage. Though a Rhymer from his earliest years, at least from the earliest impulses of the softer passions, it was not till very lately, that the applause, perhaps the partiality, of Friendship, wakened his vanity so far as to make him think any thing of his was worth showing; and none of the following works were ever composed with a view to the press. To amuse himself with the little creations of his own fancy, amid the toil and fatigues of a laborious life; to transcribe the various feelings, the loves, the griefs, the hopes, the fears, in his own breast; to find some kind of 20 counterpoise to the struggles of a world, always an alien scene, a task uncouth to the poetical mind; these were his motives for courting the Muses, and in these he found Poetry to be its own reward.

Now that he appears in the public character of an Author, he does it with fear and trembling. So dear is fame to the rhyming tribe, that even he, an obscure, nameless Bard, shrinks aghast, at the thought of being branded as 'An impertinent blockhead, obtruding his nonsense on the

world and because he can make a shift to jingle a few doggerel Scotch rhymes together, looks upon himself as a Poet of no small consequence forsooth

It is an observation of that celebrated Poet * whose divine Elegies do honor to our language our nation and our species that Humility has depressed many a genius to a hermit but never raised one to fame If any Critic catches at the word *genius* the Author tells him once for all that he certainly looks upon himself as possess of some poetic
 10 abilities otherwise his publishing in the manner he has done would be a manœuvre below the worst character which he hopes his worst enemy will ever give him but to the genius of a Ramsay or the glorious dawns of the poor unfortunate Ferguson he with equal unaffected sincerity declares that even in his highest pulse of vanity he has not the most distant pretensions These two justly admired Scotch Poets he has often had in his eye in the following pieces but rather with a view to kindle at their flame than for servile imitation

20 To his Subscribers the Author returns his most sincere thanks Not the mercenary bow over a counter, but the heart throbbing gratitude of the Bard conscious how much he is indebted to Benevolence and Friendship, for gratifying him if he deserves it in that dearest wish of every poetic bosom—to be distinguished He begs his readers, particularly the Learned and the Polite who may honour him with a perusal that they will make every allowance for Education and Circumstances of Life but if after a fair candid and impartial criticism he shall stand convicted of
 30 Dulness and Nonsense let him be done by as he would in that case do by others—let him be condemned without mercy, to contempt and oblivion

To Dr. John Moore

EDINBURGH, 17th January 1787.

... The hope to be admired for ages is, in by far the greatest part of those even who are authors of repute, an unsubstantial dream. For my part, my first ambition was, and still my strongest wish is, to please my compeers, the rustic inmates of the hamlet, while ever-changing language and manners shall allow me to be relished and understood. I am very willing to admit that I have some poetical abilities ; and as few, if any, writers, either moral or poetical, are intimately acquainted with the classes of mankind among whom I have chiefly mingled, I may have seen men and 10 manners in a different phasis from what is common, which may assist originality of thought. Still I know very well the novelty of my character has by far the greatest share in the learned and polite notice I have lately had : and in a language where Pope and Churchill have raised the laugh, and Shenstone and Gray drawn the tear ; where Thomson and Beattie have painted the landscape, and Lyttelton and Collins described the heart, I am not vain enough to hope for distinguished poetic fame.

R. B.

The Edinburgh Commonplace Book

EDINBURGH, 9th April 1787

... There are few of the sore evils under the sun give me 20 more uneasiness and chagrin than the comparison how a man of genius, nay, avowed worth, is everywhere received, with the reception which a meer ordinary character, decorated with the trappings and futile distinctions of Fortune, meets. Imagine a man of abilities, his breast glowing with honest pride, conscious that men are born equal, still giving that ' honor to whom honor is due ' ; he

meets at a Great man & table a Squire Something or a Sir Somebody he knows the noble landlord at heart gives the Bard or whatever he is a share of his good wishes beyond any at table perhaps, yet how will it mortify him to see a fellow whose abilities would scarcely have made an eight penny taylor and whose heart is not worth three farthings, meet with attention and notice that are forgot to the Son of Genius and Poverty?

The noble Glencarn has wounded me to the soul here
 10 because I dearly esteem respect and love him He showed
 so much attention engrossing attention one day, to the
 only blockhead as there was none but his lordship the
 Dunderpate and myself that I was within half a point of
 throwing down my gage of contemptuous defiance but he
 shook my hand and looked so benevolently good at parting
 —God bless him though I should never see him more I
 shall love him untill my dying day¹ I am pleased to think
 I am so capable of the throes of gratitude as I am miserably
 deficient in some other virtues With Dr Blair I am more
 20 at ease I never respect him with humble veneration, but
 when he kindly interests himself in my welfare, or still
 more, when he descends from his pinnacle and meets me
 on equal ground, my heart overflows with what is called
liking when he neglects me for the meer carcase of Great
 ness or when his eye measures the difference of our points
 of elevation I say to myself with scarcely an emotion what
 do I care for him or his pomp either?

It is not easy forming an exact judging judgment of any
 one but in my opinion Dr Blair is merely an astonishing
 30 proof what industry and application can do Natural parts
 like his are frequently to be met with his vanity is pro-
 verbially known among his acquaintances but he is justly
 at the head of what may be called fine writing, and a Critic
 of the first the very first rank in Prose even in Poesy

a good Bard of Nature's making can only take the *pas* of him. He has a heart, not of the finest water, but far from being an ordinary one. In short, he is a truly worthy and most respectable character. . . .

The most perfect character I ever saw is Mr. Stewart. An exalted judge of the human heart, and of composition. One of the very first public speakers ; and equally capable of generosity as humanity. His principal discriminating feature is ; from a mixture of benevolence, strength of mind and manly dignity, he not only at heart values, but ¹⁰ in his deportment and address bears himself to all the Actors, high and low, in the drama of Life, simply as they merit in playing their parts. Wealth, honors, all that is extraneous of the man, have no more influence with him than they will have at the Last Day. His wit, in the hour of social hilarity, proceeds almost to good-natured waggishness ; and in telling a story he particularly excels. . . .

To William Nicol

MAUCHLINE, 18th June 1787.

. . . I never, my friend, thought mankind very capable of any thing generous ; but the stateliness of the Patricians in Edinburgh, and the servility of my plebeian brethren ²⁰ (who perhaps formerly eyed me askance) since I returned home, have nearly put me out of conceit altogether with my species. I have bought a pocket Milton, which I carry perpetually about with me, in order to study the sentiments—the dauntless magnanimity, the intrepid, unyielding independence, the desperate daring, and noble defiance of hardship, in that great personage, SATAN. 'Tis true, I have just now a little cash ; but I am afraid the star that hitherto has shed its malignant, purpose-blasting rays full in my

zenith that noxious planet so baneful in its influences to the rhyming tribe I much dread it is not yet beneath my horizon Misfortune dodges the path of human life the poetic mind finds itself miserably deranged in, and unfit for the walks of business add to all that thoughtless follies and hare brained whims like so many *ignes fatui* eternally diverging from the right line of sober discretion sparkle with step-bewitching blaze in the idly gazing eyes of the poor heedless Bard till pop he falls like Lucifer never
 10 to hope again God grant this may be an unreal picture with respect to me ! but should it not I have very little dependence on mankind I will close my letter with this tribute my heart bids me pay you—the many ties of acquaintance and friendship which I have or think I have in life I have felt along the lines, and damn them ! they are almost all of them of such frail contexture that I am sure they would not stand the breath of the least adverse breeze of fortune but from you my ever dear Sir, I look with confidence for the Apostolic love that shall wait on
 20 me through good report and bad report ‘—the love which Solomon emphatically says ‘is strong as death’ My compliments to Mrs Nicol and all the circle of our common friends
 R B

To James Smith

MAUCHLINE 30th June 178,

On our return at a Highland gentleman's hospitable mansion, we fell in with a merry party, and danced till the ladies left us at three in the morning Our dancing was none of the French or English insipid formal movements, the ladies sang Scotch songs like angels at intervals then we flew at ‘Bab at the Bowster’, ‘Tullochgorum’, ‘Loch
 30 Erroch side’, &c like madges sporting in the mottie sun

or craws prognosticating a storm in a hairst-day. When the dear lasses left us, we ranged round the bowl till the good-fellow hour of six ; except a few minutes that we went out to pay our devotions to the glorious lamp of day peering over the towering top of Ben-Lomond. We all kneeled ; our worthy landlord's son held the bowl ; each man a full glass in his hand ; and I as priest, repeated some rhyming nonsense, like Thomas-a-Rhymer's prophecies, I suppose. After a small refreshment of the gifts of Somnus, we proceeded to spend the day on Lochlomond, and reach Dum- 10 barton in the evening. We dined at another good fellow's house, and consequently push'd the bottle : when we went out to mount our horses, we found ourselves ' No verra fou but gaylie yet '. My two friends and I rode soberly down the Loch side, till by came a Highlandman at the gallop, on a tolerably good horse, but which had never known the ornaments of iron or leather. We scorned to be out-galloped by a Highlandman, so off we started, whip and spur. My companions, though seemingly gayly mounted, fell sadly 20 astern ; but my old mare Jenny Geddes, one of the Rosinante family, she strained past the Highlandman in spite of all his efforts with the hair halter : just as I was passing him, Donald wheeled his horse as if to cross before me to mar my progress, when down came his horse, and threw his rider's breeless a—e in a clipt hedge ; and down came Jenny Geddes over all, and my bardship between her and the Highlandman's horse. Jenny Geddes trod over me with such cautious reverence that matters were not so bad as might well have been expected ; so I came off with a few 30 cuts and bruises, and a thorough resolution to be a pattern of sobriety for the future. . . .

To Robert Ainslie

MARCHLINE 23rd July 1787

MY DEAR AINSLIE—There is one thing for which I set great store by you as a friend and it is this that I have not a friend upon earth besides yourself to whom I can talk nonsense without forfeiting some degree of his esteem. Now to one like me who never cares for speaking any thing else but nonsense such a friend as you is an invaluable treasure. I was never a rogue, but have been a fool all my life and in spite of all my endeavours I see now plainly that I shall never be wise. Now it rejoices my heart to
 10 have met with such a fellow as you who though you are not just such a hopeless fool as I, yet I trust you will never listen so much to the temptations of the devil as to grow so very wise that you will in the least disrespect an honest fellow because he is a fool. In short I have set you down as the staff of my old age when the whole list of my friends will after a decent share of pity have forgot me

Though in the morn come sturt and strife,
 Yet joy may come at noon
 And I hope to live a merry merry life
 20 When a thur days are done

Write me soon were it but a few lines just to tell me how that good sagacious man your father is—that kind dainty body your mother—that strapping chiel your brother Douglas—and my friend Rachel who is as far before Rachel of old as she was before her blear-eyed sister Leah

R B

To Dr John Moore

MARCHLINE 2nd August 1787

I have not the most distant pretensions to what the pye-coated guardians of escutcheons call A Gentleman. When at Edinburgh last winter, I got acquainted in the Herald's

Office, and looking through that granary of Honors I there found almost every name in the kingdom ; but for me,

‘ My ancient but ignoble blood
Has crept thro’ Scoundrels ever since the flood—’

Gules, Purpure, Argent, &c. quite disowned me. My Fathers rented land of the noble Kieths of Marshal, and had the honor to share their fate. . . . I mention this circumstance because it threw my father on the world at large ; where after many years’ wanderings and sojournings, he pickt up a pretty large quantity of Observation ¹⁰ and Experience, to which I am indebted for most of my little pretensions to wisdom. I have met with few who understood ‘ Men, their manners and their ways ’ equal to him ; but stubborn, ungainly Integrity, and headlong, ungovernable Irascibility are disqualifying circumstances : consequently I was born a very poor man’s son. For the first six or seven years of my life, my father was gardiner to a worthy gentleman of small estate in the neighbourhood of Ayr. Had my father continued in that situation, I must have marched off to be one of the ²⁰ little underlings about a farm-house ; but it was his dearest wish and prayer to have it in his power to keep his children under his own eye till they could discern between good and evil ; so with the assistance of his generous Master my father ventured on a small farm in his estate. At these years I was by no means a favorite with any body. I was a good deal noted for a retentive memory, a stubborn, sturdy something in my disposition, and an enthusiastic, idiot piety. I say idiot piety, becaus[e] I was then but a child. Though I cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, ³⁰ I made an excellent English scholar ; and against the years of ten or eleven, I was absolutely a Critic in substantives, verbs and particles. In my infant and boyish days too,

I owed much to an old Maid of my Mother's remarkable for her ignorance credulity and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the county of tales and songs concerning devils ghosts fairies, brownies witches warlocks *spunkies kelpies elf-candles, dead lights* wraiths apparitions cantrips giants enchanted towers dragons and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of Poesy but had so strong an effect on my imagination that to this hour in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes
 10 keep a sharp look-out in suspicious places, and though nobody can be more sceptical in these matters than I yet it often takes an effort of Philosophy to shake off these idle terrors. The earliest thing of Composition that I recollect taking pleasure in was, The vision of Mirza and a hymn of Addison's beginning— How are Thy servants blest O Lord! I particularly remember one half-stanza which was music to my boyish ear—

For though in dreadful whirls we hung
 High on the broken wave

20 I met with these pieces in Mason's English Collection one of my school books. The two first books I ever read in private and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read again, were the life of Hannibal and the history of Sir William Wallace. Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bag pipe and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier, while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins which will boil along there till the flood gates of life shut in eternal
 30 rest. Polemical divinity about this time was putting the country half mad and I ambitious of shining in conversation parties on Sundays between sermons [at] funerals &c used in a few years more to puzzle Calvinism with so much

heat and indiscretion that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me which has not ceased to this hour.

My vicinity to Ayr was of great advantage to me. My social disposition, when not checked by some modification of spited pride, like our catechism definition of Infinitude, was 'without bounds or limits^[1]'. I formed many connections with other Youngkers who possessed superiour advantages ; the youngling Actors who were busy with the rehearsal of PARTS in which they were shortly to appear on that STAGE where, Alas ! I was destined to drudge behind the SCENES. 10 It is not commonly at these green years that the young Noblesse and Gentry have a just sense of the immense distance between them and their ragged Playfellows. It takes a few dashes into the world to give the young Great man that proper, decent, unnoticing disregard for the poor, insignificant, stupid devils, the mechanics and peasantry around him who perhaps were born in the same village. My young Superiours never insulted the clouterly appearance of my plough boy carcase, the two extremes of which were often exposed to all the inclemencies of all the seasons. 20 They would give me stray volumes of books ; among them, even then, I could pick up some observations ; and One, whose heart I am sure not even the MUNNY BEGUM's scenes have tainted, helped me to a little French. Parting with these, my young friends and benefactors, as they dropped off for the east or west Indies, was often to me a sore affliction ; but I was soon called to more serious evils. My father's generous Master died ; the farm proved a ruinous bargain ; and, to clench the curse, we fell into the hands of a FACTOR who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in 30 my Tale of two dogs. My father was advanced in life when he married ; I was the eldest of seven children ; and he, worn out by early hardship, was unfit for labour. My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken.

There was a freedom in his lease in two years more, and to weather these two years we retrenched expenses. We lived very poorly, I was a dextrous Ploughman for my years and the next eldest to me was a brother who could drive the plough very well and help me to thrash. A Novel Writer might perhaps have viewed these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I. my indignation yet boils at the recollection of the scoundrel tyrant's insolent threatening epistles which used to set us all in tears.

- 10 This kind of life the cheerless gloom of a hermit with the unceasing moil of a galley-slave brought me to my sixteenth year a little before which period I first committed the sin of RHYME.

- You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labors of Harvest. In my fifteenth autumn my Partner was a bewitching creature who just counted an autumn less. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language but you know the Scotch idiom she was
20 a bonie sweet sounsie lass. In short she altogether unwittingly to herself initiated me in a certain delicious Passion which in spite of acid Disappointment gin horse Prudence and bookworm Philosophy I hold to be the first of human joys our dearest pleasure here below. How she caught the contagion I can't say you medical folks talk much of infection by breathing the same air the touch &c but I never expressly told her that I loved her. Indeed I did not well know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her when returning in the evening from our
30 labors, why the tones of her voice made my heart strings thrill like an Eolian harp and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious rantann when I looked and fingered over her hand to pick out the nettle stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualifications she sung sweetly

and 'twas her favorite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptive as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin ; but my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love ; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he, for excepting smearing sheep and casting peats, his father living in the moors, he had no more scholar craft than I had.

10

Thus with me began Love and Poesy ; which at times have been my only, and till within this last twelve month have been my highest enjoyment. My father struggled on till he reached the freedom in his lease, when he entered on a larger farm about ten miles farther in the country. The nature of the bargain was such as to throw a little ready money in his hand at the commencement, otherwise the affair would have been impracticable. For four years we lived comfortably here ; but a lawsuit between him and his Landlord commencing, after three years tossing 20 and whirling in the vortex of Litigation, my father was just saved from absorption in a jail by phthisical consumption, which after two years promises, kindly stepped in and snatch'd him away ' To where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary be at rest '.

It is during this climacterick that my little story is most eventful. I was, at the beginning of this period, perhaps the most ungainly, awkward being in the parish. No Solitaire was less acquainted with the ways of the world. My knowledge of ancient story was gathered from Salmon's 30 and Guthrie's geographical grammars ; my knowledge of modern manners, and of literature and criticism, I got from the Spectator. These, with Pope's works, some plays of Shakespear, Tull and Dickson on Agriculture, The Pantheon,

Locke's Essay on the human understanding Stackhouse's history of the bible Justice's British Gardiner's directory, Boyle's lectures, Allan Ramsay's works Taylor's scripture doctrine of original sin, a select Collection of English songs and Hervey's meditations had been the extent of my reading. The Collection of Songs was my vade mecum. I pored over them driving my cart or walking to labor song by song verse by verse carefully noting the true tender or sublime from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe
 17 much to this for my critic-craft such as it is

In my seventeenth year to give my manners a brush I went to a country dancing school. My father had an unaccountable antipathy against these meetings and my going was what to this hour I repent, in absolute defiance of his commands. My father as I said before was the sport of strong passions from that instance of rebellion he took a kind of dislike to me which I believe was one cause of that dissipation which marked my future years. I only say Dissipation comparative with the strictness and
 20 sobriety of Presbyterian country life for though the will-o-wisp meteors of thoughtless whim were almost the sole lights of my path yet early ingrained Piety and Virtue never failed to point me out the line of Innocence. The great misfortune of my life was, never to have AN ARM. I had felt early some stirrings of Ambition, but they were the blind gropin[g]s of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave. I saw my father's situation entailed on me perpetual labor. The only two doors by which I could enter the fields of fortune were, the most niggardly economy, or the little
 30 chicaning art of bargain-making the first is so contracted an aperture I never could squeeze myself into it, the last, I always hated the contamination of the threshold. Thus abandoned of aim or view in life with a strong appetite for sociability as well from native hilarity as from a pride

of observation and remark; a constitutional hypochondriac taint which made me fly solitude; add to all these incentives to social life, my reputation for bookish knowledge, a certain wild, logical talent, and a strength of thought something like the rudiments of good sense, made me generally a welcome guest; so 'tis no great wonder that always, 'where two or three were met together, there was I in the midst of them'. But far beyond all the other impulses of my heart was, *un penchant à l'adorable moitié du genre humain*. My heart was completely tinder, and was 10 eternally lighted up by some Goddess or other; and like every warfare in this world, I was sometimes crowned with success, and sometimes mortified with defeat. At the plough, scythe or reap-hook I feared no competitor, and set Want at defiance: and as I never cared farther for my labors than while I was in actual exercise, I spent the evening in the way after my own heart. A country lad rarely carries on an amour without an assisting confident. I possessed a curiosity, zeal and intrepid dexterity in these matters which recommended me as a proper Second in duels 20 of that kind; and I dare say, I felt as much pleasure at being in the secret of half the amours in the parish, as ever did Premier at knowing the intrigues of half the courts of Europe.

The very goose feather in my hand seems instinctively to know the well-worn path of my imagination, the favorite theme of my song; and is with difficulty restrained from giving you a couple of paragraphs on the amours of my Compeers, the humble Inmates of the farm-house and cottage; but the grave sons of Science, Ambition, or Avarice baptize these things by the name of Follies. To the sons 30 and daughters of labor and poverty they are matters of the most serious nature: to them, the ardent hope, the stolen interview, the tender farewell, are the greatest and most delicious part of their enjoyments.

Another circumstance in my life which made very considerable alterations on my mind and manners was I spent my seventeenth summer on a smuggling [coast] a good distance from home at a noted school to learn Mensuration Surveying Dialling &c in which I made a pretty good progress. But I made greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. The contraband trade was at that time very successful. scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were as yet new to me and I was no enemy to social life. Here though I learned to look unconcernedly on a large tavern-bill and mix without fear in a drunken squabble yet I went on with a high hand in my Geometry till the sun entered Virgo a month which is always a carnival in my bosom a charming Fillette who lived next door to the school overset my Trigonometry, and set me off in a tangent from the sphere of my studies. I struggled on with my Sines and Co-sines for a few days more, but stepping out to the garden one charming noon to take the sun's altitude I met with my Angel

20

Like Proserpine gathering flowers
Herself a fairer flower —

It was in vain to think of doing any more good at school. The remaining week I staid. I did nothing but craze the faculties of my soul about her or steal out to meet with her and the two last nights of my stay in the country, had sleep been a mortal sin I was innocent.

I returned home very considerably improved. My reading was enlarged with the very important addition of Thomson's and Shenstone's works. I had seen mankind in a new phasis and I engaged several of my schoolfellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me. This last helped me much on in composition. I had met with a collection of letters by the Wits of Queen Ann's reign and I pored over them most devoutly. I kept copies of any of

30

my own letters that pleased me, and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents flattered my vanity. I carried this whim so far that though I had not three-farthings worth of business in the world, yet every post brought me as many letters as if I had been a broad, plodding son of Day-book and Ledger.

My life flowed on much in the same tenor till my twenty-third year. *Vive l'amour, et vive la bagatelle*, were my sole principles of action. The addition of two more Authors to my library gave me great pleasure; Sterne and M'kenzie. 10 *Tristram Shandy* and *The Man of Feeling* were my bosom favorites. Poesy was still a darling walk for my mind, but 'twas only the humour of the hour. I had usually half a dozen or more pieces on hand; I took up one or other as it suited the momentary tone of the mind, and dismissed it as it bordered on fatigue. My passions when once they were lighted up, raged like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme; and then conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet. None of the rhymes of those days are in print, except, *Winter*, a dirge, the eldest of 20 my printed pieces; 'The death of poor Mailie, John Barleycorn, And songs first, second and third: song second was the ebullition of that passion which ended the forementioned school-business

My twenty third year was to me an important era. Partly thro' whim, and partly that I wished to set about doing something in life, I joined with a flax-dresser in a neighbouring town, to learn his trade and carry on the business of manufacturing and retailing flax. This turned out a sadly unlucky affair. My Partner was a 30 scoundrel of the first water who made money by the mystery of thieving; and to finish the whole, while we were giving a welcoming carousal to the New year, our shop, by the drunken carelessness of my Partner's wife, took fire, and

was burnt to ashes and left me, like a true Poet, not worth sixpence I was obliged to give up business, the clouds of misfortune were gathering thick round my father's head, the darkest of which was, he was visibly far gone in a consumption to crown all, a belle fille whom I adored and who had pledged her soul to meet me in the field of matrimony jilted me with peculiar circumstances of mortification The finishing evil that brought up the rear of this infernal file was my hypochondriac complaint being irritated to such a degree that for three months I was in diseased state of body and mind, scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have just got their mittimus

Depart from me ye Cursed

From this adventure I learned something of a town life But the principal thing which gave my mind a turn was, I formed a bosom friendship with a young fellow, the first created being I had ever seen, but a hapless son of misfortune He was the son of a plain mechanic, but a great Man in the neighbourhood taking him under his patronage gave him a genteel education with a view to bettering his situation in life The patron dying just as he was ready to launch forth into the world the poor fellow in despair went to sea where after a variety of good and bad fortune a little before I was acquainted with him he had been set ashore by an American Privateer on the wild coast of Connaught, stript of everything I cannot quit this poor fellow's story without adding that he is at this moment Captain of a large west indiaman belonging to the Thames

This gentleman's mind was fraught with courage, independence, Magnanimity and every noble, manly virtue I loved him I admired him, to a degree of enthusiasm and I strove to imitate him In some measure I succeeded I had the pride before but he taught it to flow in proper

channels. His knowledge of the world was vastly superiour to mine, and I was all attention to learn. He was the only man I ever saw who was a greater fool than myself when WOMAN was the presiding star ; but he spoke of a certain fashionable failing with levity, which hitherto I had regarded with HORROR. Here his friendship did me a mischief ; and the consequence was, that soon after I resumed the plough, I wrote the WELCOME inclosed. My reading was only increased by two stray volumes of Pamela, and one of Ferdinand Count Fathom, which gave me ¹⁰ some idea of Novels. Rhyme, except some religious pieces which are in print, I had given up ; but meeting with Fergusson's Scotch Poems, I strung anew my wildly-sounding, rustic lyre with emulating vigour. When my father died, his all went among the rapacious hell-hounds that growl in the kennel of justice ; but we made a shift to scrape a little money in the family amongst us, with which, to keep us together, my brother and I took a neighbouring farm. My brother wanted my harebrained imagination as well as my social and amorous madness, ²⁰ but in good sense and every sober qualification he was far my superiour.

I entered on this farm with a full resolution, ' Come, go to, I will be wise ! ' I read farming books ; I calculated crops ; I attended markets ; and in short, in spite of ' The devil, the world and the flesh ', I believe I would have been a wise man ; but the first year from unfortunately buying in bad seed, the second from a late harvest, we lost half of both our crops : this upset all my wisdom, and I returned ' Like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was ³⁰ washed to her wallowing in the mire '.

I now began to be known in the neighbourhood as a maker of rhymes. The first of my poetic offspring that saw the light was a burlesque lamentation on a quarrel between two rev^d.

Calvinists both of them dramatic personæ in my Holy
 I air I had an idea myself that the piece had some merit
 but to prevent the worst I gave a copy of it to a friend
 who was very fond of these things and told him I could
 not guess who was the Author of it, but that I thought it
 pretty clever With a certain side of both clergy and laity
 it met with a roar of applause Holy Willie's Prayer
 next made its appearance and alarmed the kirk Session so
 much that they held three several meetings to look over
 10 their holy artillery if any of it was pointed against profane
 Rhymers Unluckily for me my idle wanderings led me, on
 another side point blank within the reach of their heaviest
 metal This is the unfortunate story alluded to in my
 printed poem The Lament 'Twas a shocking affair, which I
 cannot yet bear to recollect and had very nearly given one
 or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those
 who have lost the chart and mistake the reckoning of
 Rationality I gave up my part of the farm to my brother,
 as in truth it was only nominally mine, and made what little
 20 preparation was in my power for JAMAICA Before leaving
 my native country for ever I resolved to publish my
 Poems I weighed my productions as impartially as in my
 power I thought they had merit and 'twas a delicious
 idea that I would be called a clever fellow even though it
 should never reach my ears a poor Negro driver or per-
 haps a victim to that inhospitable clime gone to the world
 of Spirits I can truly say that pauvre Inconnu as I then
 was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and my
 works as I have at this moment I was pretty sure
 30 my Poems would meet with some applause, but at the
 worst the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of
 Censure and the novelty of west-Indian scenes would make
 me forget Neglect I threw off six hundred copies, of which
 I had got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty

My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the Publick; besides pocketing, all expenses deducted, near twenty pounds. This last came very seasonable, as I was about to indent myself for want of money to pay my freight. So soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the torrid zone, I bespoke a passage in the very first ship that was to sail, for

‘ Hungry ruin had me in the wind ’.

I had for some time been sculking from covert to covert under all the terrors of a Jail; as some ill-advised, ungrateful people had uncoupled the merciless legal Pack at my heels. I had taken the last farewell of my few friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed my last song I should ever measure in Caledonia, ‘The gloomy night is gathering fast’, when a letter from Dr Blacklock to a friend of mine overthrew all my schemes by rousing my poetic ambition. The Doctor belonged to a set of Critics for whose applause I had not even dared to hope. His idea that I would meet with every encouragement for a second edition fired me so much that away 20 I posted to Edinburgh without a single acquaintance in town, or a single letter of introduction in my pocket. The baneful Star that had so long shed its blasting influence in my Zenith, for once made a revolution to the Nadir; and the providential care of a good God placed me under the patronage of one of his noblest creatures, the Earl of Glencairn: ‘*Oublie moi, Grand Dieu, si jamais je l’oublie!*’

I need relate no farther. At Edin^r I was in a new world: I mingled among many classes of men, but all of them new to me; and I was all attention ‘to catch the 30 manners living as they rise’....

To Miss Chalmers

EDINBURGH 21st November 1787

I HAVE one vexatious fault to the kindly-welcome, well filled sheet which I owe to your and Charlotte's goodness—it contains too much sense, sentiment, and good spelling. It is impossible that even you two whom I declare to my God I will give credit for any degree of excellence the sex are capable of attaining it is impossible you can go on to correspond at that rate so like those who Shenstone says retire because they have made a good speech I shall after a few letters hear no more of you I insist that you shall
 10 write whatever comes first what you see what you read what you hear what you admire what you dislike trifles, bagatelles nonsense or to fill up a corner e'en put down a laugh at full length Now none of your polite hints about flattery I leave that to your lovers if you have or shall have any though thank Heaven I have found at last two girls who can be luxuriantly happy in their own munds and with one another without that commonly necessary appendage to female bliss A LOVER

Charlotte and you are just two favourite resting places
 20 for my soul in her wanderings through the weary thorny wilderness of this world—God knows I am ill-fitted for the struggle I glory in being a Poet, and I want to be thought a wise man—I would fondly be generous and I wish to be rich After all, I am afraid I am a lost subject Some folk hae a hantle o' fauts, an I'm but a ne'er-do-weel

Afternoon —To close the melancholy reflections at the end of last sheet I shall just add a piece of devotion commonly known in Carrick by the title of the 'Wabster's grace

10 Some say we're thieves and a'en sae are we
 Some say we lie and a'en sae do we
 Gude forgie us and I hope sae will he!
 —Up and to your looms lads!

R B

To Mrs. Dunlop

MAUCHLINE, 4th May 1788

MADAM—Dryden's *Virgil* has delighted me. I do not know whether the critics will agree with me, but the *Georgics* are to me by far the best of Virgil. It is indeed a species of writing entirely new to me, and has filled my head with a thousand fancies of emulation: but alas! when I read the *Georgics*, and then survey my own powers, 'tis like the idea of a Shetland pony drawn up by the side of a thoroughbred hunter, to start for the plate. I own I am disappointed in the *Æneid*. Faultless correctness may please, and does highly please, the lettered critic; but to that awful ¹⁰ character I have not the most distant pretensions. I do not know whether I do not hazard my pretensions to be a critic of any kind, when I say that I think Virgil, in many instances, a *servile* copier of Homer. If I had the *Odyssey* by me, I could parallel many passages where Virgil has evidently copied, but by no means improved, Homer. Nor can I think there is any thing of this owing to the translators; for, from every thing I have seen of Dryden, I think him in genius and fluency of language, Pope's master. I have not perused Tasso enough to form an opinion: in ²⁰ some future letter you shall have my ideas of him; though I am conscious my criticisms must be very inaccurate and imperfect, as there I have ever felt and lamented my want of learning most.

R. B.

To Mrs. Dunlop

MAUCHLINE, 29th May 1788.

... There are few circumstances relating to the unequal distribution of the good things of this life that give me more vexation (I mean in what I see around me) than the Importance that the GREAT bestow on their trifles and small matters in family affairs, compared with the same, the very

same things on the contracted scale of a cottage Last afternoon I had the honor to spend an hour or two at a good woman's fireside where the homely planks that composed the floor were decorated with a splendid carpet, and the gay table sparkled with silver and china 'Tis now about term-day and there has been a revolution among those creatures who, though in appearance Partakers and equally noble Partakers of the same Nature with Madame, yet are from time to time—their nerves their sinews their
 10 health strength wisdom experience genius, time, nay a good part of their very thoughts—sold for months and years anxious Drudges sweating weary slaves not only to the necessities the conveniences but the caprices, of the IMPORTANT FEW We talk'd of the insignificant Creatures nay notwithstanding their general stupidity and Rascality did some of the poor devils the honor to commend them

To John Beugo

ELISLAND 9th September 1788

I am here on my farm busy with my harvest, but for all that most pleasurable part of life called SOCIAL COMMUNICATION I am here at the very elbow of existence The
 20 only things that are to be found in this country, in any degree of perfection are stupidity and canting Prose they only know in graces prayers &c and the value of these they estimate as they do their plaiding webs—by the ell
 As for the muses they have as much an idea of a rhinoceros as of a poet For my old capricious but good natured hussey of a muse—

By banks of Aith I sat and wept
 When Coula I thought on
 In midst thereof I hung my harp
 30 The willow trees upon

I am generally about half my time in Ayrshire with my 'darling Jean' and then I at *lucid intervals*, throw my

horny fist across my be-cobwebbed lyre, much in the same manner as an old wife throws her hand across the spokes of her spinning-wheel. . . .

To John Tennant

ELLISLAND, 22nd December 1788.

MY DEAR SIR—I yesterday tried my cask of whisky for the first time, and I assure you it does you great credit. It will bear five waters, strong, or six, ordinary, toddy. The whisky of this country is a most rascally liquor ; and, by consequence, only drunk by the most rascally part of the inhabitants. I am persuaded, if you once get a footing here, you might do a great deal of business, in the way of 10
consumpt ; and should you commence Distiller again, this is the native barley country. I am ignorant if, in your present way of dealing, you would think it worth while to extend your business so far as this country side. I write you this on the account of an accident, which I must take the merit of having partly designed too. A neighbour of mine, a John Currie, miller in Carse-mill—a man who is, in a word, a good man, a ‘ very ’ good man, even for a £500 bargain—he and his wife were in my house the time I broke open the cask. They keep a country public-house and sell 20
a great deal of foreign spirits, but all along thought that whisky would have degraded their house. They were perfectly astonished at my whisky, both for its taste and strength ; and, by their desire, I write you to know if you could supply them with liquor of an equal quality, and at what price. Please write me by first post, and direct to me at Ellisland, near Dumfries. If you could take a jaunt this way yourself, I have a spare spoon, knife and fork, very much at your service. My compliments to Mrs. Tennant, and all the good folks in Glenconner and Barquharie. I am, 30
most truly, my dear Sir, yours,

ROBT. BURNS.

To Mrs Dunlop

ELLISLAND *New year day morning 1789*

- THIS Dear Madam is a morning of wishes and would to God that I came under the Apostle James's description — The effectual fervent Prayer of a *righteous man* availeth much In that case Madam, you should welcome in a Year full of blessings every thing that obstructs or disturbs tranquility and self-enjoyment should be removed, and every Pleasure that frail Humanity can taste should be yours I own myself so little a Presbyterian that I approve of set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of
- 10 Devotion for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of Instinct, or even sometimes and with some minds to a state very little superior to mere Machinery This Day, the first Sunday of May a breezy, blue skyed noon sometime about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end of Autumn, these time out of mind have been with me a kind of Holidays Not like the Sacramental Executioner face of a Kilmarnock Communion but to laugh or cry be cheerful or pensive, moral
- 20 or devout according to the mood and tenor of the Season and Myself I believe I owe this to that glorious Paper in the *Spectator*, 'The Vision of Murza', a Piece that struck my young fancy before I was capable of fixing an idea to a word of three syllables 'On the fifth day of the moon which according to the custom of my forefathers I always keep holy after having washed myself and offered up my morning devotions I ascended the high hill of Bagdat, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer' &c
- 30 We know nothing or next to nothing of the substance or structure of our Souls so cannot account for those seem-

ing caprices in them, that one shall be particularly pleased with this thing, or struck with that, which, on Minds of a different cast, makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favorite flowers in Spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the hare-bell, the foxglove, the wild brier-rose, the budding birk and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud, solitary whistle of the Curlew in a summer noon, or the wild, mixing cadence of a troop of grey-plover in an Autumnal-morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like 10 the enthusiasm of Devotion or Poesy. Tell me, my dear Friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery that, like the Eolian harp, passive, takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to these proofs of those awful and important realities, a God that made all things, man's immaterial and immortal nature, and a World of weal or woe beyond death and the grave, these proofs that we deduct by dint of our own powers and observation. However respectable Indi- 20 viduals in all ages have been, I have ever looked on Mankind in the lump to be nothing better than a foolish, headstrong, credulous, unthinking Mob; and their universal belief has ever had extremely little weight with me. Still I am a very sincere believer in the Bible; but I am drawn by the conviction of a Man, not the halter of an Ass. . . .

To Mrs. Dunlop

ELLISLAND, 25th January 1790.

. . . Falconer, the unfortunate author of the 'Shipwreck', that glorious poem which you so much admire, is no more. After weathering the dreadful catastrophe he so feelingly describes in his poem and after weathering many hard gales 30

of fortune he went to the bottom with the *Aurora* frigate !
 I forget what part of Scotland had the honor of giving him
 birth but he was the son of obscurity and misfortune He
 was one of those daring adventurous spirits which Scotland
 beyond any other nation is remarkable for producing Little
 does the fond mother think as she hangs delighted over the
 sweet little leech at her bosom where the poor fellow may
 hereafter wander and what may be his fate I remember
 a stanza in an old Scottish ballad which notwithstanding
 10 its rude simplicity speaks feelingly to the heart

Little did my mother think
 That day she cradled me
 What land I was to travel in
 Or what death I should die !

Old Scots songs are you know a favorite study and pur-
 suit of mine, and now I am on that subject allow me to
 give you two stanzas of another old simple ballad which
 I am sure will please you The catastrophe of the piece is
 a poor ruined female lamenting her fate She concludes
 20 with this pathetic wish

O that my father had ne'er on me smil'd
 O that my mother had ne'er to me sung !
 O that my cradle had never been rock'd
 But that I had died when I was young !
 O that the grave it were my bed
 My blankets were my winding sheet
 The clocks and the worms my bedfellows a
 And O sae sound as I would sleep !

I do not remember in all my reading to have met with
 30 any thing more truly the language of misery than the
 exclamation in the last line Misery is like love to speak
 its language truly, the author must have felt it

To Peter Hill

ELLISLAND, 2nd March 1790

. . . I want likewise for myself, as you can pick them up, second-handed or anything cheap, copies of Otway's Dramatic Works, Ben Johnson's *Do.*, Dryden's, Congreve's, Wycherley's, Vanbrugh's, Cibber's, or any dramatic works of the more modern Macklin, Garrick, Foote, Colman or Sheridan. A good copy, too, of Molière, in French, I much want. Any other good French dramatic authors in their native language, I want these: I mean comic authors chiefly, though I should wish Racine, Corneille and Voltaire too. I am in no hurry for all, or any, of these, but if 10 you accidentally meet with them very cheap, get them for me. . . .

I am out of all patience with this vile world for one thing. Mankind are by nature benevolent creatures, except in a few scoundrelly instances. I do not think that avarice of the good things we chance to have is born with us, but we are placed here amid so much nakedness and hunger, and poverty and want, that we are under a damning necessity of studying selfishness, in order that we may EXIST! Still there are, in every age, a few souls that all the wants and 20 woes of life cannot debase to selfishness or even give the necessary alloy of caution and prudence. If ever I am in danger of vanity, it is when I contemplate myself on this side of my disposition and character. God knows I am no saint: I have a whole host of follies and sins to answer for; but if I could (and I believe I do it as far as I can), I would 'wipe away all tears from all eyes'. Even the knaves who have injured me, I would oblige them; though, to tell the truth, it would be more out of vengeance, to shew them that I was independent of and above them, than 30 out of the overflowings of my benevolence. Adieu!

ROBT. BURNS.

To Miss Helen Craik

ELLISLAND 9th August 1790

It is often a reverse of mine when I am disposed to be melancholy the characters and fates of the Rhyming tribe There is not among all the martyrologies that ever were penned so rueful a narrative as Johnson's Lives of the Poets In the comparative view of wretches the criterion is not what they are doomed to suffer but how they are formed to bear Take a being of our kind give him a stronger imagination and more delicate sensibility which will ever between them engender a more ungovernable set
 10 of passions than the usual lot of man implant in him an irresistible impulse to some idle vagary, such as arranging wild flowers in fantastical nosegays, tracing the grasshopper to his haunt by his chirping song watching the frisks of the little minnows in the sunny pool or hunting after the intrigues of wanton butterflies, in short, send him adrift after some wayward pursuit which shall eternally mislead him from the paths of Lucre yet curse him with a keener relish than any man living for the pleasures that only lucre can bestow lastly fill up the measure of his woes by
 20 bestowing on him a spurning sense of his own dignity, and you have created a wight nearly as miserable as a poet

To you Madam I need not recount the fairy pleasures the Muse to counterbalance this catalogue of evils, bestows on her votaries

To Alexander Findlater

ELLISLAND [c. June 1791]

DEAR SIR—I am both much surprised and vexed at that accident to Lorimer's stock The last survey I made prior to Mr Lorimer's going to Edinburgh, I was very particular in my inspection and the quantity was certainly in his

possession, as I stated it. The surveys I made during his absence might as well have been marked ' Key absent ', as I never found any body but the lady, who, I know, is not mistress of keys, &c., to know anything of it, and one of the times it would have rejoiced all Hell to have seen her so drunk. I have not surveyed there since his return. I know the gentleman's ways are, like the grace of G—, past all comprehension ; but I shall give the house a severe scrutiny to-morrow morning and send you in the naked facts.

10

I know, Sir, and regret deeply that this business glances with a malign aspect on my character as an officer ; but as I am really innocent in the affair, and as the gentleman is known to be an illicit dealer, and particularly as this is the *single* instance of the least shadow of carelessness or impropriety in my conduct as an officer, I shall be peculiarly unfortunate if my character shall fall a sacrifice to the dark manœuvres of a smuggler. I am, Sir, your obliged and obedient humble servant,

ROBT. BURNS.

Sunday even.

I send you some rhymes I have just finished which tickle 20 my fancy a little.

To Peter Hill

DUMFRIES, 5th February 1792.

MY DEAR FRIEND—I send you by the bearer, Mr. Clarke, a particular friend of mine, six pounds and a shilling, which you will dispose of as follows :—£5, 10s. per account I owe Mr. Robt. Burn, architect, for erecting the stone over poor Fergusson. He was two years in erecting it after I commissioned him for it ; and I have been two years in paying him after he sent me his account : so he and I are quits. He had the hardness to ask me interest on the sum ; but, considering that the money was due by one Poet for putting 30

a tombstone over another he may with grateful surprise thank Heaven that he ever saw a farthing of it

With the remainder of the money, pay yourself for the *Office of a Messenger* that I bought of you, and send me by Mr Clarke a note of its price Send me, likewise the fifth volume of the *Observer* by Mr Clarke and if any money remain, let it stand to account

My best compliments to Mrs Hill I sent you a maukin by last week's Fly which I hope you received Yours
10 most sincerely ROBT BURNS

To George Thomson

DUMFRIES 16th September 1792

SIR—I have just this moment got your letter As the request you make will positively add to my enjoyments in complying with it I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of abilities I have strained to their utmost exertion by the impulse of enthusiasm Only, don't hurry me Deil tak the hindmost ' is by no means the *Crie de guerre* of my muse Will you as I am inferior to none of you in enthusiastic attachment to the poetry and music of old Caledonia and since you request it, have cheer-
20 fully promised my mite of assistance—will you let me have a list of your airs with the first line of the verses you intend for them that I may have an opportunity of suggesting any alteration that may occur to me—you know 'tis in the way of my trade—still leaving you Gentlemen the undoubted right of publishers to approve or reject at your pleasure, in your own publication I say the *first line* of the verses because if they are verses that have appeared in any of our collections of songs I know them and can have recourse to them Apropos if you are for English verses there is on
30 my part an end of the matter Whether in the simplicity of the Ballad or the pathos of the Song, I can only hope to

please myself in being allowed at least a sprinkling of our native tongue. . . .

As to remuneration, you may think my songs either *above* or *below* price ; for they shall absolutely be the one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c., would be downright sodomy of soul ! A proof of each of the songs that I compose or amend, I shall receive as a favor. In the rustic phrase of the season, ' God speed the wark ! ' I am, Sir, your very humble servant, 10

ROBT. BURNS.

P.S.—I have some particular reasons for wishing my interference to be known as little as possible. R. B.

T o G a v i n H a m i l t o n

DUMFRIES, 16th July 1793.

MY DEAR SIR—I understand that our friend, Mrs. Muir of Tarbolton Mill, is likely to be involved in great difficulties as to the Settlement the late Miller made. Will you be so obliging as to let me know the state of the case ; and if you think it would answer any good purpose to advocate the cause to Edinburgh at once, I can answer for her—a Writer to the Signet, an intimate friend of mine, will cheer- 20
fully undertake the business, without a single sixpence of fees ; and our countryman, David Cathcart, lies under promise to me to advocate at small expense whenever I represent female poverty in distress. I am much interested for her, and will, as far as I have interest in either, move heaven and earth in her behalf. My interest in the first is vastly improved since you and I were first acquainted. Oh, there is nothing like matrimony for setting a man's face Zionward ; whether it be that it sublimates a man above the visible diurnal sphere, or whether it tires him of this 30

sublunary state, or whether the delicious morsel of happiness which he enjoys in the conjugal yoke gives him a longing for the feasts above or whether a poor husband thinks he has every chance in his favour, as, should he go to hell, he can be no worse—I shall leave to a well waled Presbytery of orthodox Ayrshire priests to determine—Yours most sincerely
ROBT BURNS

To George Thomson

DUMFRIES September 1793

MY DEAR SIR—You know that my pretensions to musical taste are merely a few of Nature's instincts untaught and
10 untutored by art For this reason many musical compositions particularly where much of the merit lies in counterpoint however they may transport and ravish the ears of you connoisseurs affect my simple lug no otherwise than merely as melodious din On the other hand by way of
amends I am delighted with many little melodies which the learned musician despises as silly and insipid I do not know whether the old air Hey tutti, taitie', may rank
among this number but well I know that with Fraser's hautboy it has often filled my eyes with tears There is
20 a tradition which I have met with in many places in Scotland, that it was Robert Bruce's March at the battle of Bannockburn This thought, in my yesternight's evening-walk, warmed me to a pitch of enthusiasm on the theme of liberty and independence which I threw into a kind of Scots Ode fitted to the air that one might suppose to be the gallant royal Scot's address to his heroic followers on that eventful morning

[Here follows *Bruce to his Men at Bannockburn* see pp 119–20]

So may God ever defend the cause of Truth and Liberty,
as He did that day! Amen
ROBT BURNS

P.S.—I shewed the air to Urbani, who was highly pleased with it, and begged me make soft verses for it ; but I had no idea of giving myself any trouble on the subject, till the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for Freedom, associated with the glowing ideas of some other struggles of the same nature, *not quite so ancient*, roused my rhyming mania. Clarke's set of the tune, with his bass, you will find in the *Museum*, though I am afraid that the air is not what will entitle it to a place in your elegant selection. R. B.

TO MRS. M'LEHOSE

CASTLE DOUGLAS, 25th June 1794.

BEFORE you ask me why I have not written you, first let me be informed by you, *how* I shall write you. 'In friendship' you say ; and I have many a time taken up my pen to try an epistle of 'friendship' to you ; but it will not do : 'tis like Jove grasping a pop-gun, after having wielded thunder. When I take up the pen, recollection ruins me. Ah ! my ever dearest Clarinda ! Clarinda ! What a host of memory's tenderest offspring crowd on my fancy at that sound ! But I must not indulge that subject. You have forbid it.

I am extremely happy to learn that your health is re-
established and that you are once more fit to enjoy that
satisfaction in existence which health alone can give us.
My old friend Ainslie has indeed been kind to you. I had
a letter from him a while ago, but it was so dry, so distant,
so like a card to one of his clients that I could scarce bear
to read it, and have not yet answered it. He is a good
honest fellow, and *can* write a friendly letter, which would
do equal honour to his head and his heart, as a whole sheaf
of his letters which I have by me will witness ; and though
Fame does not blow her trumpet at my approach *now*, as 30

she did *then*, when he first honored me with his friendship yet I am as proud as ever, and when I am laid in my grave I wish to be stretched at my full length that I may occupy every inch of ground I have a right to

You would laugh were you to see me where I am just now Would to Heaven you were here to laugh with me though I am afraid that crying would be our first employment! Here am I set a solitary hermit, in the solitary room of a solitary inn, with a solitary bottle of wine by me
 10 as grave and as stupid as an owl but like that owl still faithful to my old song in confirmation of which, my dear Mrs Mac here is your good health! May the hand-waied benisons o Heaven bless your bonie face, and the wratch wha skellies at your welfare may the auld tinkler deil get him to clout his rotten heart! Amen

To George Thomson

DUMFRIES September 1794

LITTLE do the Trustees for our Manufactures, when they frank my letters to you—little do they consider what kind of manufacture they are encouraging The manufacture of Nonsense was certainly not in idea when the Act of Parlia
 20 ment was framed and yet under my hands and your cover, it thrives amazingly Well there are more pernicious manufactures that is certain

I shall withdraw my O'er the seas and far away ' altogether it is unequal and unworthy of the work. Making a poem is like begetting a son you cannot know whether you have a wise man or a fool until you produce him to the world and try him

For that reason I send you the offspring of my brain abortions and all, and as such, pray look over them and
 30 forgive them and burn them

I am flattered at your adopting Ca the yowes to the

knowes', as it was owing to me that ever it saw the light. About seven years ago, I was well acquainted with a worthy little fellow of a clergyman, a Mr. Clunzie, who sung it charmingly; and, at my request, Mr. Clarke took it down from his singing. When I gave it to Johnson, I added some stanzas to the song, and mended others, but still it will not do for *you*. In a solitary stroll which I took to-day, I tried my hand on a few pastoral lines, following up the idea of the chorus, which I would preserve. Here it is, with all its crudities and imperfections on its head.

10

[Here follows *Ca' the yowes to the knowes*: see p. 121]

I will give you my opinion of your other newly adopted songs, my first scribbling fit. Adieu! R. B.

To George Thomson

DUMFRIES [— May 1795].

TEN thousand thanks, my dear Sir, for your elegant present; though I am ashamed of the value of it being bestowed on a man who has not by any means merited such an instance of kindness. I have shewn it to two or three judges of the first abilities here, and they all agree with me in classing it a first-rate production. My phiz is *sae ken-speckle* that the very joiner's apprentice whom Mrs. Burns employed to break up the parcel (I was out of town that 20 day) knew it at once. You may depend upon my care that no person shall have it in their power to take the least sketch from it. My most grateful compliments to Allan, that he has honored my rustic Muse so much with his masterly pencil. One strange coincidence is that the little one who is making the felonious attempt on the cat's tail is the most striking likeness of an ill-deedie, damn'd, wee; rumble-gairie hurchin of mine, whom, from that propensity to witty wickedness and manfu' mischief which, even at

twa days auld, I foresaw would form the striking features
 of his disposition, I named 'Willie Nicol', after a certain
 Friend of mine who is one of the masters of a Grammar-
 school in a city which shall be nameless. Several people
 think that Allan's likeness of me is more striking than
 Nasmyth's for which I sat to him half-a-dozen times.
 However there is an artist of very considerable merit just
 now in this town who has hit the most remarkable likeness
 of what I am at this moment that I think ever was taken
 10 of any body. It is a small miniature, and as it will be in
 your town getting itself be-crystallized &c, I have some
 thoughts of suggesting to you to prefix a vignette taken
 from it to my song 'Contented wi' little and cantie wi
 mair' in order that the portrait of my face and the picture
 of my mind may go down the stream of Time together.

To James Johnson

DUMFRIES 16th June 1796

You should have had this when Mr Lewars called on
 you, but his saddle-bags miscarried. I am extremely
 anxious for your work as indeed I am for every thing con-
 cerning you and your welfare. You are a good worthy
 20 honest fellow, and have a good right to live in this world
 because you deserve it. Many a merry meeting this Pub-
 lication has given us, and possibly it may give us more,
 though alas! I fear it. This protracting, slow, consuming
 illness which hangs over me will, I doubt much my ever-
 dear friend, arrest my sun before he has well reached his
 middle career, and will turn over the Poet to far other and
 more important concerns than studying the brilliancy of
 Wit or the pathos of Sentiment. However Hope is the
 cordial of the human heart, and I endeavour to cherish it
 30 as well as I can. Let me hear from you as soon as con-

venient. Your Work is a great one ; and though now that it is near finished, I see, if we were to begin again, two or three things that might be mended, yet I will venture to prophesy, that to future ages your Publication will be the text-book and standard of Scottish Song and Music.

I am ashamed to ask another favor of you, because you have been so very good already ; but my wife has a very particular friend of hers, a young lady who sings well, to whom she wishes to present *The Scots Musical Museum*. If you have a spare copy, will you be so obliging as to send it by the very first Fly, as I am anxious to have it soon. 10

Yours ever,

R. BURNS.

To Alexander Cunningham

BROW, 7th July 1796

MY DEAR CUNNINGHAM—I received yours here this moment and am indeed highly flattered with the approbation of the literary circle you mention ; a literary circle inferior to none in the two kingdoms. Alas ! my friend, I fear the voice of the bard will soon be heard among you no more ! For these eight or ten months I have been ailing, sometimes bedfast and sometimes not ; but these last three months I have been tortured with an excruciating rheumatism, 20 which has reduced me to nearly the last stage. You actually would not know me if you saw me. Pale, emaciated and so feeble as occasionally to need help from my chair—my spirits fled ! fled !—but I can no more on the subject—only the medical folks tell me that my last and only chance is bathing and country quarters, and riding. The deuce of the matter is this : when an Exciseman is off duty, his salary is reduced to £35 instead of £50. What way, in the name of thrift, shall I maintain myself and keep a horse in country quarters—with a wife and five children at home, on £35 ? 30

I mention this because I had intended to beg your utmost interest and all the friends you can muster to move our Commissioners of the Excise to grant me the full salary—I dare say you know them all personally. If they do not grant it me I must lay my account with an exit truly *en poëte*. If I die not of disease I must perish with hunger.

To George Thomson

BROW 12th July 1796

AFTER all my boasted independence, curst necessity compels me to implore you for five pounds. A cruel scoundrel
 10 of a Haberdasher, to whom I owe an account, taking it into his head that I am dying, has commenced a process and will infallibly put me into jail. Do, for God's sake send me that sum and that by return of post. Forgive me this earnestness but the horrors of a jail have made me half-distracted. I do not ask all this gratuitously, for upon returning health I hereby promise and engage to furnish you with five pounds worth of the neatest song genius you have seen. I tried my hand on *Rothiemurchie* this
 morning. The measure is so difficult that it is impossible
 20 to infuse much genius into the lines—they are on the other side. Forgive forgive me!—Yours R BURNS

NOTES

MACKENZIE'S REVIEW

'Dugald Stewart, and some of my learned friends', says Burns, 'put me in the periodical paper called *The Lounger*.' Apparently, therefore, it was not on his own initiative that Henry Mackenzie (1745-1831) came forward when he did in praise of the Ayrshire ploughman-poet. His essay, though generous in parts, is clearly the work of a man whose literary ideals were far removed from those of Burns. The vernacular was not for Mackenzie's pen. He was a Scot ambitious to show that English could be written as well in Edinburgh as in London; and he came to be called the 'Scottish Addison'. Yet, during the closing decades of the eighteenth century, and in spite of the advent of Burns, it was Mackenzie who enjoyed the literary homage of Edinburgh society. And his review is important, not so much for the justness or generosity of its criticism, as because it serves to measure and define the response of the Edinburgh litterati to Burns's book.

PAGE 2, l. 8. *One bar, indeed, &c.* Mackenzie's fears for Burns on the score of his 'language' or 'provincial dialect' were shared by the rest of Edinburgh society then. The poet was frequently advised by his new patrons and their friends to abandon the vernacular and establish his fame by writing in English. Perhaps the criticism did not surprise him much. The Kilmarnock edition included a glossary that ran to 4½ pages, though the head-note to it states that 'words that are universally known, and those that differ from the English only by the elision of letters by apostrophes, or by varying the termination of the verb, are not inserted'.

l. 25. *above this visible diurnal sphere.* Adapted from Milton, *Paradise Lost*, vii. 22: 'Within the visible Diurnal Sphere.' Burns may have recalled the phrase from Mackenzie in his letter of 16 July 1793 (see p. 157).

PAGE 3, l. 22. *Against some passages, &c.* This may refer to comments heard in social intercourse; but it points also to a sentence in the earliest notice of Burns's poems, in *The Edinburgh Magazine or Literary Miscellany* for October 1786. 'He seems to be a boon companion and often startles us with a dash of libertinism, which will keep some readers at a distance.' The writer of this brief notice declares that Burns lacks both the 'doric simplicity' of Ramsay and the 'brilliant

imagination' of Fergusson. He thinks it unlikely that the poems will find favour with men of culture and education, and commends them rather to those who admire the exertions of untutored fancy.

PAGES 3 and 4 *we shall look upon his lighter Muse* some *exceptionable parts*. This passage was revised by Mackenzie for the first collected edition of *The Lounger* (3 vols 1787) described on the title-page as the second edition corrected. The revised version reads as follows:

We shall not look upon his lighter Muse as the enemy of religion (of which in several places he expresses the justest sentiments) though she has sometimes been a little unguarded in her ridicule of hypocrisy.

In this as in other respects it must be allowed that there are exceptionable parts &c

Mackenzie was apparently anxious to publish this version without delay and did not wait for his second edition corrected to give it to the world. The essay is quoted at length —because it has received we are told some corrections since its first publication on the 9th of December—in *The Edinburgh Magazine* for Dec 1786 which appeared (according to custom) about the 3rd of the following month. So that everything considered this slight revision would seem to corroborate the general impression that Mackenzie's review with all its critical merits is the common voice of Edinburgh culture rather than an independent and individual estimate.

PAGE 4, l 21 *some of his countrymen* i.e. some of the West Country or Ayrshire gentry in Edinburgh.

l 23 *a West-Indian clime*. Burns intended in 1786 to emigrate to Jamaica.

l 29 *wood-notes wild* Milton *L Allegro* 134.

BURNS IN 1786-7 DUGALD STEWART

Dugald Stewart (1753-1828) was Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh from 1785 till 1810. As a lecturer he influenced the next generation profoundly. His disciples were among his best works, says Sir James Mackintosh. And Henry Cockburn who attended his classes in the pen portrait he gives in *Memorials of his Time* declares they were the great era in the progress of young men's minds. For Burns's estimate of his character see p 129.

PAGE 5, l 2 *my house in Ayrshire* near Catrine a village within two miles of Mauchline. The meeting was described by Burns in the *Lines on meeting with Lord Daer* see p 93.

l. 19. *he aimed at purity, &c.* This trait, which would seem remarkable in a ploughman to one of Dugald Stewart's social standing, is a reminder that Burns was not altogether without education and book-learning in his youth; and more particularly that his first serious and deliberate attempts at writing were in prose, the result of poring 'most devoutly' over 'a collection of letters by the Wits of Queen Ann's reign'.

l. 22. *He came to Edinburgh, &c.* Burns's first residence in Edinburgh was from 28 November 1786 till 5 May 1787.

BURNS IN 1786-7: SIR WALTER SCOTT

PAGE 7, l. 14. *Virgilium vidi tantum.* Ovid, *Tristia*, IV. x. 51.

l. 21. *the late venerable Professor.* Adam Ferguson (1724-1816), Dugald Stewart's predecessor in the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh. See Cockburn's *Memorials of his Time* for a sketch of his character.

l. 27. *Bunbury.* Henry William Bunbury (1750-1811), artist and caricaturist.

PAGE 8, l. 13. *poem of Langhorne's, &c.* The verses are from a section entitled 'Apology for Vagrants' in Part I of John Langhorne's *The Country Justice*, 1774.

l. 22. *Mr. Nasmyth's picture.* Alexander Nasmyth (1757-1840) drew from memory the full-length sketch of Burns, which formed the frontispiece to Lockhart's *Life* (1828). But Scott refers here to the portrait for which Burns sat to the artist in the early months of 1787, and from which Beugo engraved the head used as frontispiece to the first Edinburgh edition of the poems.

l. 29. *douce gudeman*, prudent and respectable head of the house.

PAGE 9, l. 13. *Allan Ramsay* (1686-1758), the poet who began the revival of Scottish poetry which culminated in Burns. His *Evergreen* (1724), a collection of older Scottish poetry, and his *Tea-Table Miscellany* (1724-32), a collection of English and Scottish songs, old and new, are among the principal documents of the revival, and were both well known to Burns. Ramsay's own songs, like his better-known pastoral, *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725), suffer from the attempt to combine the influence both of Scots and of English models. His best original work was done as the satirist and depicter of contemporary low life.

l. 14. *Fergusson.* Robert Fergusson (1750-74), a finer poet than Ramsay, and more important for the student of Burns. The Scots poems in his volume of 1773 not only determined

Burns towards the vernacular—they influenced him in detail. Written in a Scots that was pure and refined—being modelled on the best usage of the educated classes of the time—they first revealed to Burns the full poetic possibilities of his native tongue—and the debt of the Kilmarnock edition to Fergusson is patent even in word and phrase.

126 *the late Duchess of Gordon* Jane (? 1749-1812) wife of Alexander fourth Duke of Gordon, the gayest and most vivacious leader of fashion in Edinburgh society. Her mother was an Ayrshire lady a Blair of Blair—hence perhaps her interest in Burns—who in a letter of 13 December 1786 names her first in a list of his avowed patrons and patronesses.

JEFFREY'S REVIEW

R. H. Cromek (1770-1812) was a sort of border never in literature—who plundered the sons of genius to his own profit. And Jeffrey (1773-1850) had few words to spare good or bad for a Cromek volume. But *The Reliques* was an opportunity he had waited for ever since he became editor of *The Edinburgh Review* in 1803—an opportunity of speaking of Burns as we wished to speak of him—and he took it giving Cromek a page or two only of very qualified praise at the end of his essay.

Burns was an obvious theme for Jeffrey, advocate alike in letters and in the law—from the publication of Currie's edition of the Works in 1800. Currie's task was a delicate one at best—and he had made it no easier by intruding his theories about the use of alcohol. His *Life of Burns* in consequence began a debate echoes of which may still be heard. But the first test of debate was over by the foundation of *The Edinburgh Review*—and by 1808, when Cromek appeared, the lull was so complete that probably no one looked for more words on the subject. It was Jeffrey's part to disappoint such expectations—and by the force of his genius to set the issue in a broader light. His reading of Burns may remind us of Scott's remark in his Journal—my friend Jeffrey loves to see the imagination best when it is bitten and managed and ridden upon the *grand pas*. But his verdict is at least a verdict on the writings of Burns subserved—not muddled as the verdicts of his predecessors had been—by his opinion of the man. And if it honours Burns on this side idolatry—its severities need deceive no one who is at all informed on Jeffrey's standpoint and general aim as a critic of literature—clearly defined in the preface to his collected essays. I have he writes more uniformly and earnestly than any preceding critic made the Moral tendencies

of the works under consideration a leading subject of discussion ; and neglected no opportunity, in reviews of Poems and Novels as well as of graver productions, of elucidating the true constituents of human happiness and virtue : and combating those besetting prejudices and errors of opinion which appear so often to withhold men from the path of their duty—or to array them in foolish and fatal hostility to each other.'

PAGE 11, l. 3. *sweet austere composure*. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, iv. 272.

PAGE 14, l. 22. *Dr. Currie*. James Currie, M.D. (1756–1805), editor of *The Works of Robert Burns, with an Account of his Life, and a Criticism of his Writings*, 1800. For Dr. Moore and Mrs. Dunlop, see pp. 127 and 147 and notes.

LOCKHART'S LIFE

J. G. Lockhart (1794–1854), the son-in-law of Scott, was editor of *The Quarterly* in 1828 ; and his character had softened from the days when, as a contributor to 'Maga' (*Blackwood's Magazine*), he was 'the scorpion which delighteth to sting the faces of men'. His *Life of Burns* is pleasantly free from contentious criticism of previous critics and biographers ; and it still ranks as a model for its judicious yet sympathetic interpretation.

PAGE 16, l. 15. *said Johnson*. The passage is quoted, with omissions and minor inaccuracies, from *The Rambler*, No. 36.

PAGE 17, l. 15. *In huts where poor men lie*. Wordsworth, *Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle*, 161.

l. 21. *Knew his own worth, &c.* Cf. Beattie, *The Minstrel*, i. 59.

l. 29. *man's inhumanity to man*. Burns, *Man was made to Mourn*, 55.

l. 31. *Mr. Campbell*. Thomas Campbell, the poet (1777–1844). In a life of Burns, included in his *Specimens of the British Poets* (1819), he writes with reference to the 'strictures' in Jeffrey's article : 'That Burns's education, or rather the want of it, excluded him from much knowledge, which might have fostered his inventive ingenuity, seems to be clear ; but his circumstances cannot be admitted to have communicated vulgarity to the tone of his sentiments.' Lockhart's criticism is directed against the first part of this sentence as inadequate.

PAGE 18, l. 23. *such, for example, &c.* For a poem described by Burns himself as 'in the manner of Pope's *Moral Epistles*', and written September 1788, see *To Robert Graham, Esq., of Fintry, requesting a Favour* (Henley and Henderson, ii. 119). Another epistle to the same patron, of 5 October 1791 (Henley and Henderson, i. 271), may serve to illustrate his attempt at

the heroic satire most part of it was only revised in 1791, from fragments of a satirical *Poet's Progress* written in 1788-9

CARLYLE'S REVIEW

Jeffrey as editor asked Carlyle (1795-1881) to undertake this essay on the eve of the latter's departure for Craigenputtock when (as Carlyle puts it a few days later 10 June 1828) men in general were making another uproar about Burns because of Lockhart's *Life*. The essay is the work of a man as inclined as Jeffrey himself to lay stress on the 'moral tendencies' of a poet's book. But Carlyle had one qualification for reviewing Burns which Jeffrey lacked. He resembled Burns in birth and in his early acquaintance with poverty. Sentiment therefore as well as duty shapes Carlyle's periods. And his judgment of Burns—in essence the same as Jeffrey's—because it is less pontifical in manner less austere in tone has been as indiscriminately commended as Jeffrey's has been indiscriminately condemned.

PAGE 21, l 13 *Ret sch* Friedrich August Moritz Retzsch (1779-1857) draughtsman and painter famous for his illustrations to German poets and to Shakespeare

PAGE 22, l 5 *sweet as the smile &c* Burns *Here's a health to ane I loe dear* Chorus 3-4

STEVENSON'S ESSAY

This essay was suggested by J. C. Shairp's *Burns* in the English Men of Letters series which Stevenson (1850-94) criticizes in his opening paragraphs. One of my high water marks and again the best thing I ever did are Stevenson's own estimate of his paper after its appearance. When it was only three parts written he described it more particularly as long dry unsympathetic but sound and I think in its dry way interesting. It was unsympathetic' no doubt because a step taken in approaching this very gay subject for study awakened the moralist and novelist in Stevenson and dulled his usual interest in the ring of words when the right man rings them. — 'I made a kind of chronological table' we read of his various loves and lusts and have been comparatively speechless ever since. And so the greater part of *Some Aspects of Robert Burns* is a chance missed. But the last section on Burns's Works does something to balance the account. Here the path taken is much less trodden and Stevenson walks in it with real distinction.

PAGE 23, l 2 *gives us a paraphrase* See Shairp's *Burns*

p. 195. The passage paraphrased is from *The Auld Farmer's New-Year Morning Salutation*, ll. 67-72 (p. 77).

HENLEY'S ESSAY

W. E. Henley (1849-1903) criticized Stevenson for his 'Shorter Catechist' view of the character of Burns. But his own essay is little better on that side. The peasant and the poet are still two people in Henley. And the former, 'peasant of genius' though he may be called, is presented as the dominant partner, controlling the poet, not in any wise affected or modified in turn by the poet. Henley's Burns, in short, is only less crude as a likeness of the man, only less wide of the mark, than Arnold's 'beast, with splendid gleams'. But Henley could play the literary historian better than the judge of character. And those parts of his essay which seek to place Burns in the general story of Scottish letters, are a real contribution towards a final estimate of this poet's quality. Only Minto, in his *Historical Relationships of Burns* (published 1894), had covered this ground with anything like the same knowledge and discernment.

PAGE 25, l. 16. *Hamilton of Gilbertfield*. William Hamilton of Gilbertfield, in Lanarkshire, (? 1665-1751), author of *Willie was a Wanton Wag*, of *The Last Dying Words of Bonnie Heck* (the design of which Burns followed in his *Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie*), of verse-epistles to Allan Ramsay (which again served Burns as models), and of an abridged and popular paraphrase of Blind Harry's *Wallace*—the book that (says Burns) 'poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest' (see p. 134).

l. 24. *Sempill of Beltrees*. Robert Sempill (? 1595-?1665), the first vernacular poet to break the silence that followed the Reformation, and a main link between the older 'makars' and the generation of Ramsay. His *Life and Death of the Piper of Kilbarchan*, or *The Epitaph of Habbie Simson* first applied an old Scots measure to the purposes of comic elegy, and from *Bonnie Heck* to *Poor Mailie* called forth so many echoes, that Ramsay named the stanza (so employed) 'standard Habbie'—a name that still holds.

PAGE 26, l. 27. *Montgomerie's Banks of Helicon*. Alexander Montgomerie (?1540-?1610), the last of the 'makars', and, like the greatest of them, Dunbar, a keen experimenter and finished artist in metre. Whether he wrote *The Banks of Helicon* is doubtful. But he was one of the first to copy, and the first to popularize, the metre of that poem—in *The Cherrie and the Slae*.

A quatorzain it seems to unite an old mediæval French stave of 10 lines with a 4 line stanza known to the mediæval Latin hymn writers Ramsay learnt it from Montgomerie and Burns (with whom it was a favourite) from Ramsay For an example from Burns see *Epistle to Davie*, p. 35

RALEIGH'S ESSAY

Sir Walter Raleigh's essay written to introduce a new edition of Lockhart's *Life* is a study of the mind and temperament behind the poems of Burns rather than of the poems themselves It hits the mark where so many others fail because there is here no astonishment that the man who by fall of circumstance was a ploughman and an exciseman happened also to be born a poet Burns therefore has been sought first of all in his writings and the mass of tradition and hearsay and anecdote—born of regarding him as a prodigy—is not allowed to blur or distort what the poems and letters in their frankness adequately reveal

PAGE 32

MARY MORISON

Two heroines have been suggested for this song neither of them on sure grounds The song hardly reads like a Burns transcript from actual experience It is more like a draft on the fancy inspired by a poem reprinted in Ramsay's *Evergreen* In *The Lovers' Mane* (moan) that dares not assay will be found something of the sentiment and much of the tune of *Mary Morison* And this origin is in keeping with Burns's remark when he sent the song to Thomson 20 March 1793 as one of his juvenile works — I do not think it very remarkable either for its merits or demerits Thomson did not publish it in his *Scottish Airs* till 1818

PAGE 33.

MY NANNIE O

In all his own editions of this song Burns printed *Stinchar* But Thomson introduced *Lugar* at the suggestion of Burns who when he sent him the song for his Collection on 26 Oct 1792 wrote as follows 'In the printed copy of *My Nannie O* the name of the river is horribly prosaic I will alter it

Behind yon hills where { *Girvan* flows
 { *Lugar*

Girvan is the river that suits the idea of the stanza best but *Lugar* is the most agreeable modulation of syllables Why Burns himself retained the prosaic *Stinchar* even after 1792 is clear on looking at the map For the idea of the

stanza ' is not (as has been supposed) to indicate where lay the home of the woman who inspired the song, but to mark the close of day, in a late month of the year, by a reference to the going down of the sun: and, while the valleys of the Stinchar and of the Girvan lie both beyond the hills to the south-west of Lochlea and Mossiel, that of the Lugar lies, if anything, to the east of south. The 'agreeable modulation' of *Lugar* could be had, therefore, only at the cost of a disturbing inaccuracy in the image to be suggested. As to the heroine celebrated—Burns himself confesses that the passion which inspired the song 'was, at the time, real'—there is no reason to doubt the statement of Gilbert Burns, that she was Agnes Fleming of the parish of Tarbolton.

PAGE 34. GREEN GROW THE RASHES, O

This piece is a good example of Burns's way with the coarse old songs which he found, allied to good tunes, on the lips of the folk. He cleansed and re-created them; and the excellence of the new has swept the old into oblivion. Burns transcribed this song into his First Commonplace Book in August, 1784—all but the last stanza, which was probably added when he revised the piece for the Edinburgh edition of 1787.

PAGE 35. EPISTLE TO DAVIE, A BROTHER POET

This was addressed to David Sillar (1760–1830), son of a Tarbolton farmer. He was admitted a member of the Bachelors' Club soon after Burns met him in 1781. In 1783 he opened a grocer's shop in Irvine. He published a volume of poems in 1789: but failing to make a career in Edinburgh as a writer, returned to Irvine, where he took up teaching, and became a town-councillor and magistrate before his death. For the quatorzain in which the poem is written, see note on Alexander Montgomerie, pp. 171–2.

l. 25. '*Mair speir na, nor fear na.*' 'Ramsay' (R. B.). But the line has not been found in Ramsay. It seems to have been suggested by one or other of three lines in *The Evergreen*: (1) '*Nocht feiring, but speiring*'—*On the Creation, and Paradyce lost*, stanza 4; (2) '*Nocht feirful, but cheirful*'—*The Vision*, stanza 11; (3) '*Then feir nocht nor heir nocht*'—*The Cherrie and the Slae*, stanza 27.

PAGE 38. HOLY WILLIE'S PRAYER

Holy Willie was the nickname of William Fisher, an elder in the parish church of Mauchline, the minister of which was the Rev. William Auld—'God's ain priest' of line 53, and one of

the 'Auld Licht' party In the autumn of 1784 the Kirk Session led by these men charged Gavin Hamilton—Burns's landlord and the most intimate of his Ayrshire patrons—with habitual neglect of church ordinances', and threatened to debar him from the communion table Hamilton appealed to the Presbytery of Ayr and in January 1785 the Presbytery having heard both sides ordered the Session to erase their minute It was at this point that Burns intervened with his satire—that the muse overheard [Holy Willie] at his devotions as follows The case was not ended however The Session refused to obey the Presbytery and appealed to the Synod and not till 17 July 1785 were they constrained to grant Hamilton a certificate that he was free from public scandal or ground of church censure known to us

PAGE 41 DEATH AND DOCTOR HORNBOOK

This gentleman Dr Hornbook is professionally a brother of the sovereign order of the ferula but by intuition and inspiration is at once an apothecary surgeon and physician (R B's note to line 79) His name was John Wilson and he belonged to Tarbolton The story goes that Wilson had aired his medical knowledge in Burns's presence at a masonic meeting that the poet on his way home encountered 'one of those floating ideas of apparitions he mentions in his letter to Dr Moore (see p 134) and that out of the stirring of the fancy which resulted the poem began at once to make itself It is also said that Wilson was ruined by the ridicule of the piece and had to leave the district He certainly settled and died in Glasgow But as he was still acting as session-clerk in Tarbolton as late as 8 January 1793 the immediate effect of Burns's joke has probably been exaggerated After all the mood reflected is rather irresponsible than deliberately malicious

l 26 *Willie's mill* Tarbolton Mill on the Water of Fail It belonged to William Muir, a close friend of the Burns family

l 44 *busy sowing* This rencontre happened in the seed-time 1785' (R B)

l 66 *At mony a house* An epidemical fever was then raging in that country (R B)

l 81 *Buchan* Buchan's Domestic Medicine (R B) This work by Dr William Buchan (1729-1805) was first published in 1769 and was long a favourite among country people

l 85 *Johnny Ged* The grave-digger (R B) *Ged* is Scots for pike a fish greedy for prey

PAGE 46.

TO WILLIAM SIMPSON

William Simpson was schoolmaster at Ochiltree, a village some six miles to the south of Mossgiel. His letter (also in verse), to which Burns here replies, was apparently prompted by a sight of *The Two Herds, or The Holy Tulyie*—a poem in which, about a month previous, Burns had taken advantage of a public quarrel between two 'auld-licht' ministers in Kilmarnock to satirize their party in the church, and commend the broader, less puritanical party known as the 'new-licht'. Burns gave a copy of this satire to a friend, with the remark that he 'could not guess who was the Author of it' (letter to Dr. Moore, p. 144); but there is nothing to show that the friend referred to was William Simpson; and anyhow the authorship of the piece did not long lie in doubt. (Burns's more immediate reply to Simpson's letter will be found in the Postscript, which is not given in our extract.)

l. 13. *in a creel*. The image here derives from a marriage custom not unknown among the poorer classes of Burns's day. Ramsay refers to it in a note to Canto III, stanza 12, of his own version of *Christ's Kirk on the Green*; and Sir John Sinclair's *Statistical Account of Scotland* (1792) contains a description of it, supplied by the parish minister of Galston, near Kilmarnock. Its purpose was to discover whether the marriage had been consummated. It took place on the second day after the marriage; and was called a *Creeling*, because a *creel* or basket filled with stones was the means employed. After some preliminary fooling among the company generally, this creel with its load was fastened on the back of the young husband; and there it remained till his wife gathered courage to relieve him of it. 'Her complaisance in this particular', says the Galston minister, 'is considered as a proof of her satisfaction with the choice she has made.' *In a creel*, therefore, is Burns's wittily immodest way of suggesting his own modest opinion of his attainments in verse. To be likened to his great predecessors and models excited sensations within his breast—like those in the breast of the young husband at a *Creeling*—at once pleasing and disconcerting.

ll. 14-18. *to speel . . . the braes o' fame*. Cf. Fergusson's *To my Auld Brecks*, 40: 'Wi' you I've speel'd the braes o' rhyme'. For the authors mentioned, see notes on pp. 167, 168, 171.

l. 31. *Coila*. See note on *The Vision*, l. 85 (p. 177).

l. 40. *New Holland*, the old name for Australia.

ll. 47-8, and 51-4. In August 1785, only three months later, Burns puts this in prose form in his First Commonplace Book. But his mood had changed by then: 'This is a complaint

I would gladly remedy, but alas! I am far unequal to the task both in native genius and education

L 108 Until 14 April 1786 in his Proposals for publishing Burns usually wrote his name *Burness* Burns here and Burns in the signature to the letters of 27 December 1781 and 17 November 1782 are the only known exceptions

PAGE 50

POOR MAILIE'S ELEGY

One day at Lochlea after his return from Irvine Burns and his brother Gilbert were setting out with their teams when a herd boy anxiously reported that the poet's pet ewe had entangled herself in the tether and was lying in the ditch. The boy's look and manner so amused Burns that though the sheep was put right at the plough tail that day he gave the incident a tragic turn and in the evening says Gilbert

he repeated to me her *Death and Dying Words* pretty much in the way they now stand. *The Death and Dying Words of Poor Mailie* though in octosyllabics is otherwise directly reminiscent of Hamilton of Gilbertfield's *Last Dying Words of Bonnie Heck* *Poor Mailie's Elegy*—an appendix to the plough-tail poem—was Burns's attempt to emulate the form of his model and of his model's model—Sempill's *Epitaph of Habbie Simson*. A good example of Burns's use of the standard Habbie stanza proper—i.e. of this 6 line stanza applied to the purposes of comic elegy its second rhyme running on the word *dead*—it may have been made soon after *The Death and Dying Words*. But the earlier version that exists apparently did not please Burns. He did not transcribe it with *The Death and Dying Words* into his First Commonplace Book in June 1785 and it is crude work to have been written by him subsequent to that date. The much greater finish of the revised *Elegy* (1785-6) is due to Burns's recent kindling at the flame of Ferguson whose elegies *On the Death of Mr David Gregory* and *On the Death of Scots Music* it resembles—rather than older models—in general atmosphere and tone.

PAGE 52

THE VISION

This poem though revised at Mossburn was originally written much earlier. Burns alludes to it in 1787 as composed long ago. Ramsay not Ferguson is its sponsor and echoes of Burns's English reading are frequent.

Duan. Duan a term of Ossian's for the different divisions of a digressive poem. See his *Cath-loda* vol. 2 of M. Pherson's Translation. (R.B.)

l. 1. *The sun had closed &c* Cf. *My Nannie* O p. 33 l. 3

1. 67. *Know the great Genius, &c.* A reminiscence of Pope, *Rape of the Lock*, I. 41-2:

Know, then, unnumber'd Spirits round thee fly,
The Light Militia of the lower sky.

1. 85. *Of these am I, &c.* Cf. Pope, *Rape of the Lock*, I. 105-6:

Of these am I, who thy protection claim,
A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name.

Coila—guardian spirit of poets and poesy in Burns's division of Ayrshire, Kyle ('this district')—was suggested by the 'muse Scota' addressed by Alexander Ross (1699-1784) in his *Fortunate Shepherdess*, 1768.

1. 87. *the Campbells*, of Loudoun, who dated from the days of Bruce, when Sir Duncan Campbell of Lochow married Sussanah Crawford, heiress of Loudoun. They became Earls of Loudoun in 1633.

11. 121-6. *I saw thy pulse's, &c.* The thought of these lines, no doubt, came to Burns from his experience of passion in himself and in his own life. But the elements of its expression as certainly lie in Young's *Night Thoughts*, Night VII, 524-38:

Think not our Passions from *Corruption* sprung,
Tho' to Corruption, now, they lend their Wings; &c.

1. 131. *And some, the pride, &c.* This cannot have been written before 1784 and the Mossgiel days. The reference is probably to Gavin Hamilton in chief; and not till 1784 was Burns on intimate terms with him.

1. 147. *Potosi*, in Bolivia, or (in Burns's day) Southern Peru; noted for its silver.

PAGE 57.

TO A MOUSE

Composed 'while the author was holding the plough'. (Gilbert Burns.)

1. 39. *The best laid schemes, &c.* Cf. Blair's *Grave*, 185-6:

The best-concerted schemes men lay for fame
Die fast away.

PAGE 59. THE COTTER'S SATURDAY NIGHT

The subject and the plan of this poem were suggested by Fergusson's *Farmer's Ingle*. But English models supplied the stanza (the Spenserian, borrowed not direct from Spenser, but from Shenstone and Beattie), and overlaid the style the frequent imitation and reminiscence of English writers resulting in a Scots that is often little better than English in disguise. In more vernacular mood, Burns could have made this work the crowning example of his 'manners-painting strain'. But

the poem remains as good a picture of a Scottish interior as any yet written

ll 1-9 *November chill &c* The first verse recalls Ferguson's *Chais* 7

Could blows the nippin North wi' angry sough

But the stanza as a whole suggests the opening of Gray's *Elegy*

l 8 *the morn i.e. the morrow (Sunday)*

l 17 *Asaugh and care* revised in 1793 to read *carling cares*—*Asaugh* appearing too dialectal and antiquated

l 76 *As Bible* so named from its use at family worship in olden days in the noble's hall

PAGE 63.

ADDRESS TO THE DEIL

The Devil has been a theme for burlesque in Scottish poetry both learned and popular from very early days. The Reformation and Calvinism only increased the tendency so to treat him. And Burns, who liked to tilt at the dogmas of the more rigid theologians, was not likely to miss an opportunity so obvious and sanctioned. His glee in opposition was the greater at finding a giant like Milton ranged against him. True in depression or when out of step with life Burns could admire the Satan of *Paradise Lost* (see e.g. the letter to Drowl, p. 129) but in normal poetic mood his reaction to the hero of Milton's epic is what we see in stanzas 15 and 16 of the *Address*—a burlesque précis of Milton's central episode. Even the last stanza, which Carlyle quotes as evidence of the wide range of the poet's sympathy and love, is evidence rather of his hilarious enjoyment of the traditional Scottish view—another jab at the minister. To be appreciated the poem must be read as satire, confident and good-humoured. Sentiment inspires it little if at all.

ll 1-2 *O Thou I, &c.* Cf. Pope *The Dunciad* 1 19-20

ll 85-90 *Langsyne &c* This is one of the places revised by Burns on the eve of publication to remove an allusion to Jean Armour with whom he was then at difference. The stanza originally read

Langsyne in Eden's happy scene

When strappin' Edie's days were green

An' Eve was like my bonnie Jean

My dearest part

A dancin' sweet young handsome queen

Wi' guileless heart

Recast and original alike recall the opening stanza of Ferguson's *Cauler Water* (to make a pair with which Burns had recently written his *Scotch Drink*)

Whan father Adie first put spade in
The bonny yard of ancient Eden, &c.

l. 101. *the man of Uz*, Job.

l. 111. *Sin' that day*, &c. ' *Vide* Milton, Book 6th, [323-7].'
(R. B.)

PAGE 67.

HALLOWEEN

' The following poem will, by many readers, be well enough understood ; but for the sake of those who are unacquainted with the manners and traditions of the country where the scene is cast, notes are added, to give some account of the principal charms and spells of that night, so big with prophecy to the peasantry in the west of Scotland. The passion of prying into futurity makes a striking part of the history of human nature in its rude state, in all ages and nations ; and it may be some entertainment to a philosophic mind, if any such honour the author with a perusal, to see the remains of it, among the more unenlightened in our own.' (Burns's prefatory note.) The ' scene ' of the poem is in Carrick, the southern and least developed part of Ayrshire in Burns's day ; and the ' manners and traditions ' here portrayed are more antique than is usual with Burns in such poetry. He is drawing after the stories and legends told him in boyhood by his mother and Betty Davidson—both natives of Carrick—more than from observation of the life about him.

l. 5. *Colean*, the Marquess of Ailsa's place, now known as Culzean Castle.

l. 132. *Mar's-year*, 1715, the year of the Jacobite Rebellion raised by the Earl of Mar.

PAGE 74. THE AULD FARMER'S SALUTATION

l. 14, *steeve*, an' *swank*. Cf. Fergusson : *Lines to the University of St. Andrews*, 37 :

Mair hardy, souple, steeve, and swank.

' Steeve ' is a favourite word with Fergusson.

l. 35. *Kyle-Stewart*, the northern part of Kyle, between the Irvine and the Ayr. The southern part, between the Ayr and the Doon, was called King's-Kyle.

PAGE 78.

THE TWA DOGS

Written in Feb. 1786, ' after the resolution of publishing was nearly taken ', to commemorate the poet's dog Luath, which some one wantonly killed on the eve of William Burnes's death in 1784. Burns's original idea was ' to introduce something into the book under the title of " Stanzas to the memory of a

quadruped friend, but this plan says Gilbert was given up for the tale as it now stands. The poem is modelled upon Fergusson's *Mutual Complaint of Planestanes and Causey*.

l 1 *that place* &c i.e. *hyk*. Coilus was a mythical king of the Picts whose place of burial was said to be near the mansion-house of Coilfield (now Montgomerie) in Tarbolton parish.

l 11 *some place far abroad* Newfoundland.

l 27 *dog in Highland sang* Cuchullin's dog in Ossian's *Fingal* (R. B.).

l 58 *yellow letter d* *Geordie* guinea.

l 65 *Our whipper in* Hugh Andrew huntsman at Coilfield Tarbolton. (See Helso Hunter's *Life Studies of Character* p. 19).

ll 93-100 *I is noticed* &c See letter to Dr Moore p. 135.

The factor is also the rascal of line 144.

l 146 *gentle* i.e. gentle-born.

ll 149 et seq. *Haith lad* &c This imaginary picture of gentry's life may be compared with Burns's account of his first opportunity of studying a lord at close quarters—in the *Lines on meeting with Lord Daer* pp. 93-5.

PAGE 87 TO A MOUNTAIN DAISY

Burns sent this as his very latest production to John Kennedy, factor at Dumfries House (near Mauchline) on 20 April 1786. I am a good deal pleased with some sentiments myself, he wrote, as they are just the native querulous feelings of a heart which, as the elegantly melting Gray says, melancholy has marked for her own.

l 51 *Stern Ruin* &c Cf. Young *Night Thoughts* Night IV. 167-8.

Stars rush and final ruin fiercely drives
Her ploughshare o'er creation!

PAGE 89 THERE WAS A LAD

This song may have been written in 1783. Cromek printed it with three other pieces of verse and a scrap of prose dated

May and headed *Egotisms from my own Sensations* (a phrase borrowed from Shenstone's *Essays*) in his version of Burns's *First Commonplace Book*. Burns's own MS. of this Book has a good deal of other matter (not given in Cromek) in the interval between August [1784] and August [1785] where Cromek prints the pieces indicated and the latter seem never to have formed part of Burns's finished copy. They may however have been rough copy that he ultimately decided not to include. For in the abridged version of the Book in the Glenriddel MSS. (1791), Burns inserts the Cromek pieces to fill

a gap left in the original between September [1784] and June 1785. Editors prefer 1786 as the date of *There was a Lad*, because one of the accompanying pieces, in Cromek and in the Glenriddel MS, refers to the poet's Jean, while another is the *Elegy on the Death of Robert Ruisseau*. But it is not improbable that Burns met Jean Armour a year before the usually accepted date, April, 1785; and the lines

' Tho' mountains rise, and deserts howl,
And oceans roar between '

need not imply that he was already contemplating emigration to Jamaica. Likewise, in the *Elegy*, the French pun on his name (ruisseaux = rivulets, burns) need not have waited till the decision (in 1786) to drop the form *Burness*.

l. 10. *five-and-twenty*, &c. ' Jan. 25th, 1759, the day of my Bardship's vital existence.' (R. B.)

PAGE 90. ADDRESS TO THE UNCO GUID

This returns, but in more rhetorical mood, upon the theme of Coila's lines in *The Vision* (see p. 56, ll. 121-6 and note). The dispassionate Unco Guid here satirized are of the company Young describes—*Night Thoughts*, Night VII, 521-3, as

' Ye gentle theologues, of calmer kind !
Whose constitution dictates to your pen,
Who, cold yourselves, think ardour comes from Hell !

PAGE 92. THE GLOOMY NIGHT IS GATHERING FAST

See letter to Dr. Moore, p. 145.

PAGE 93. LINES ON MEETING WITH LORD DAER

These lines ' were really extempore, but a little corrected since ', says Burns, in sending them to Dr. John Mackenzie of Mauchline a day or two after the meeting—at Dugald Stewart's house on 23 Oct. 1786 (see p. 5 and note). Lord Daer (1759-94), second son of the Earl of Selkirk and a former pupil of Dugald Stewart, chanced to be of the company.

l. 34. *The fient a pride*, &c. Cf. *The Two Dogs*, l. 16 (p. 79).

PAGE 95. MACPHERSON'S FAREWELL

' The songs marked Z in the *Museum* I have given to the world as old verses to their respective tunes,' says Burns; ' but, in fact, of a good many of them little more than the chorus is ancient.' The *Farewell* is so marked; and it is one of the exceptions here indicated. Burns wrote to Thomson: "' M'Pherson's Farewell " is mine, excepting the chorus, and one stanza.' His original seems to have been one of those ' excellent new songs ' to which Gilbert alludes as hawked about the country in

the poet's boyhood—a broadside called *The Last Words of James Macpherson Murderer* Macpherson was hanged at Banff 10 November 1700

PAGE 96

OF A THE AIRS

Composed out of compliment to Mrs Burns —N B It was during the honeymoon (From Burns's note in his interleaved copy of Johnson's *Museum*) He wrote it apparently during his early days at Ellisland when (Mrs Burns being still in Ayrshire) he was eight or ten days there and at Mauchline alternately

PAGE 96

GO FETCH TO ME A PINT O WINE

Burns quotes these as two other old stanzas which please me mightily in a letter to Mrs Dunlop 17 December 1788 In his interleaved note to Johnson he allows the first half stanza as old but claims the rest The ferry (l. 6) is Queensferry Berwick law (l. 7) is North Berwick Law in Haddingtonshire

PAGE 97

AULD LANG SYNE

This song Burns nowhere claims as his own It is signed Z in the *Museum* like *Macpherson's Farewell* but unlike the *Farewell* it is not at the same time credited to Burns (by the editor) in the title and contents On Ramsay's version in vol. 1 of the *Museum* Burns's interleaved note refers to the old fragment which will appear in the *Museum* vol. v —i.e. his version And writing of it to Thomson in 1793 he calls it the old song of the olden times and which has never been in print nor even in manuscript until I took it down from an old man's singing Again to Mrs Dunlop in 1788 it is quoted as an old song and tune which has often thrilled through my soul and followed by the comment—Light be the turf on the breast of the Heaven inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment! There is more of the fire of native genius in it than in half a dozen of modern English Bacchanals Burns then claims only an editor's interest in this song and the merit of having recovered from an old man's singing the genuine original of the several versions popular in his day To what extent he refurbished his find cannot now be determined he himself clearly thought it so little as to be negligible In favour of taking Burns at his word it may be noted that in both Ramsay's version and the version in Watson (1711) a love-interest has been added to the older bacchanalian note They might each be described like the broadside original found for Watson—itsself evidence of a still older form—as An Excellent and proper new ballad entitled *Old Long Syne*

Newly corrected and amended, with a large and new edition of several excellent love lines'. Burns's work on *Auld Lang Syne*, whatever it was, has put an end to such tinkering. He could not have done more as author of the song than he has done as its editor. There is no dissociating it from his name till the nameless author he praised is discovered

ll. 9-12. *And surely, &c.* This stanza is placed last in Thomson. The general drama of the piece is in favour of Johnson's order, as here.

PAGE 98.

JOHN ANDERSON, MY JO

Burns's transformation of an indecent popular song, for the tune's sake.

PAGE 99.

TAM GLEN

Before its appearance as Burns's work in the *Museum*, this ballad somehow got printed in *The Edinburgh Magazine* for November, 1789 signed T. S.; whence no doubt it was copied into *The Edinburgh Evening Courant* of 22 December 1789.

l. 21. *the Valentines' dealing*, the custom on St. Valentine's day of choosing a valentine or lover by drawing lots.

l. 25. *last Halloween*. See *Halloween*, p. 72 (Burns's note).

PAGE 100. WILLIE BREWED A PECK O' MAUT

Burns's interleaved note in Johnson reads: 'The air is Masterton's; the song mine. The occasion of it was this: Mr. Wm. Nicol of the High School, Edinburgh, during the autumn vacation [1789] being at Moffat, honest Allan (who was at that time on a visit to Dalswinton) and I went to pay Nicol a visit. We had such a joyous meeting that Mr. Masterton and I agreed, each in our own way, that we should celebrate the business.' For Nicol, see p. 129 and note. Allan Masterton was afterwards writing-master at Edinburgh High School: he died 1799.

PAGE 101.

TO MARY IN HEAVEN

One of the songs to the poet's 'Highland Mary'. She was Mary Campbell, daughter of a Clyde sailor; and seems to have been an early love, to whom Burns turned again when Jean Armour crossed his purposes in 1786, since the famous parting would seem to have taken place in May of that year. Burns's note to the song *My Highland Lassie, O*, vague though it be, contains all that is definitely known of their connexion. 'This was a composition of mine in very early life,' it reads, 'before I was known at all in the world. My "Highland Lassie" was a warm-hearted, charming young creature as ever blessed a man with generous love. After a pretty long tract

of the most ardent reciprocal attachment we met by appointment on the second Sunday of May in a sequestered spot by the Banks of Ayr where we spent the day in taking farewell before she should embark for the West Highlands to arrange matters for our projected change of life. At the close of the Autumn following she crossed the sea to meet me at Greenock where she had scarce landed when she was seized with a malignant fever which hurried my dear girl to the grave in a few days before I could even hear of her illness.

The poem hesitates between two moods—one of bereavement the other of passionate remembrance of the day of parting. In *Highland Mary* (pp. 114-15) where the latter mood is allowed to gain on the former—though the double aim is still felt Burns comes nearer to success. The hesitation in the present poem accounts perhaps for the reminiscences suggested—e.g. in lines 4-8 of Thomson's ode *Tell me thou soul of her I love* and again in the third stanza of *Black & Grace* 94-110.

PAGE 102

TAM O SHANTER

When Burns and Francis Grose the antiquary (1731-91) met in 1789 the latter was collecting material for his *Antiquities of Scotland* and Burns suggested he should include in engraving of Alloway Kirk in his account of Ayrshire. Grose agreed on condition that the poet would furnish a witch story to be printed along with it. In an undated letter Burns sent him three tales in prose the second of which he afterwards used for *Tam o Shanter*. The poem appeared in Grose's book in April 1791. Of previous editions that in *The Edinburgh Herald* (18 March) is probably the earliest for *The Edinburgh Magazine* for March did not appear till about 3 April. Both the *Herald* and the *Magazine* belonged to James Sibbald.

Tam o Shanter is a tale of diablerie of no specified period. But tradition has indicated originals for the several characters introduced, from among Burns's contemporaries. Tam was drawn from Douglas Graham (1739-1811) of Shanter Farm near Kirkoswald; his wife from Helen M Taggart (or Graham) (1742-98). Souter Johnny from John Davidson (1728-1806) of Kirkoswald. Hurkton Jean was Jean Kennedy, who kept a respectable public house in Kirkoswald—Hurkton in Scotland signifies any village that has a kirk and Nannie or Cuffy sark was Kate Steen or Steven (d. 1816) of the parish of Kirkoswald an accomplice of smugglers with a reputation for witchcraft and fortune telling.

l. 50. Ainslie says that when Burns recited the poem to him at Lilliesland in 1790 there followed after chorus the lines—

The crickets joined the chirping cry,
The kittlin chased her tail for joy.

ll. 89-96. In Burns's day, the road from Ayr into Carrick by the Brig o' Doon passed considerably to the west of Alloway Kirk (not, as now, close by its eastern end). It turned east just before reaching the Doon, and led past the southern side of the Kirk ruin, some 200 yards before crossing the Brig. Tam's first view of Alloway Kirk was therefore from a point to the south-west; and the points in his route here mentioned are now on private ground and mostly obliterated.

ll. 125-42. This list of horrors was more revised by Burns than any other part of the poem.

After line 142, all MSS. and all the separate early prints add :

Three Lawyers' tongues, turned inside out,
Wi' lies seamed like a beggar's clout ; [rag
Three Priests' hearts, rotten black as muck,
Lay stinking, vile, in every neuk. [corner.

These lines Burns omitted from his later Edinburgh editions at the advice of Fraser Tytler.

ll. 151-8. Mrs. Burns told Cromek how she came upon the poet, by the banks of the Nith, when he had just conceived this passage. She also told him—or he misunderstood her as saying—that *Tam o' Shanter* as a whole was composed that day, which Burns spent in his favourite walk by the river. Lockhart gave currency to the legend, and quotes Mr. M'Diarmid as confirming Cromek. But what the legend suggests on close inspection is, not that *Tam o' Shanter* was 'the work of one day', but that Burns found difficulty in carrying forward at this particular point. That the first news of the poem to reach Mrs. Dunlop, in November 1790, was a copy of 'only one half of it' from an unknown source—down apparently to the 'heart and tongue' verses that were later omitted by Burns—perhaps favours this interpretation.

ll. 163-4. Cf. Ramsay, *The Three Bonnets*, Canto I, 83-4 :

She was a winsome wench and waly,
And could put on her claes fu' brawly.

l. 206. *the key-stane of the brig*. 'It is a well-known fact that witches, or any evil spirits, have no power to follow a poor wight any farther than the middle of the next running stream. It may be proper likewise to mention to the benighted traveller that when he falls in with *bogles*, whatever danger may be in his going forward, there is much more hazard in turning back.' (R. B.)

PAGE 110

YE FLOWERY BANKS

On 11 March 1791 an earlier version of this song was sent by Burns to Alexander Cunningham as newly sketched out to the tune of Ballendalloch's Reel for the fourth volume of Johnson's *Museum*. *Ye Flowery Banks* an obvious revision of this earlier set was enclosed in an undated note (probably of the same period) to John Ballantine of Ayr. Apparently Johnson or Clarke his musical editor did not care for the tune Burns had used. The song that was accepted by them for the fourth volume was the third version—*Ye Banks and Braes*—written to The Caledonian Hunt's Delight and therefore in a modified stanza.

PAGE 111

BONNIE WEE THING

Composed on my little idol—the charming lovely Davies (Burns's interleaved note in Johnson). Miss Davies was daughter of Dr Davies of Tenby Pembrokeshire and related to Burns's friend Capt Riddell of Friar's Carse.

PAGE 112

AE FOND KISS

This celebrates the poet's farewell meeting on 6 December 1791 with Mrs M Lehose (Clarinda)—for whom see p 159 and note. Its opening lines echo *The Parting Kiss* of Robert Dodsley (1703-64).

PAGE 113

BONNIE LESLEY

Miss Lesley Baillie the heroine of this song was an Ayrshire beauty whom Burns met in the Edinburgh days when dining at her father's. He was almost he says in the predicament of the Children of Israel when they could not look on Moses' face for the glory that shone in it when he descended from Mount Horeb. In August 1792 Mr Baillie with his two daughters and a friend called on Burns in Dumfries on their way into England. I took my horse Burns writes to Mrs Dunlop—though God knows I could ill spare the time—and accompanied them fourteen or fifteen miles and dined and spent the day with them. 'Twas about nine I think that I left them and riding home I composed the following ballad, and he transcribes *Bonnie Lesley*.

PAGE 114

HIGHLAND MARY

See note *To Mary in Heaven* on p 183. The castle of Montgomery was Coilsfield in Tarbolton parish a seat of the Montgomeries.

PAGE 115

DUNCAN GRAY

An earlier set was sent by Burns to Johnson and published in the *Museum* vol II (1788). Both sets derive from the old

indecent song among Herd's MSS., and were made for the sake of its tune—a 'kind of light-horse gallop of an air which precludes sentiment: the ludicrous is its ruling feature'. (Burns to Thomson: December 1792.) Some two years later Burns tried to comply with Thomson's request for 'second' sets to his songs—in English; and it was the attempt to fit the air of 'Duncan Gray' that provoked his utterance: 'These English songs gravel me to death. I have not that command of the language that I have of my native tongue.' Ailsa Craig (line 11) is the 'craggy ocean-pyramid' over 1,100 feet high off the Ayrshire coast.

PAGE 116. BRAW LADS O' GALA WATER

Another refurbished old song, versions of which occur in Johnson, in Herd, and in chap-book form. (The Gala and the Ettrick are tributaries of the Tweed; the Yarrow of the Ettrick.)

PAGE 117. LORD GREGORY

Written for the air 'Lord Gregory', at Thomson's request, to replace words from *The Lass of Lochroyan* then current to that air.

PAGE 118. WHISTLE, AND I'LL COME TO YOU, MY LAD

This was built up from the chorus, which Burns found among Herd's MSS. He published an earlier version of one stanza only in the *Museum*, vol. ii (1788). The present set was sent to Thomson early in August 1793. Two years later Burns proposed altering the last line of the chorus to

'Thy Jeanie will venture wi' ye, my lad',

because 'a Fair One, herself the heroine of the song, insists on the amendment'. This was Jean Lorimer, Burns's Chloris. See note on p. 199

PAGE 119. SCOTS WHA HAE

See letter to Thomson, pp. 158-9, and notes. Thomson, like Urbani, did not think 'Hey, tutti, taitie' the tune for these words. He chose the air of 'Lewie Gordon' instead, and got Burns to lengthen the last line of each stanza to meet the new tune, e.g. 'Or to glorious victorie', 'Forward, let us do or die'; and so it was published by him in 1799. The original form and tune, however, were given in the next volume (1802), in response to public clamour, excited by the revelation in Currie of the story of the change. Thomson said, in a note, that he had 'changed his opinion' on the suitability of 'Hey, tutti, taitie' to Burns's words.

ll. 21-4. *Lay the proud usurpers, &c.* 'I have borrowed the last Stanza from the common stall edition of *Wallace*—

' A false usurper sinks in every foe
And liberty returns with every blow —
a couplet worthy of Homer ' (Burns to Thomson)

PAGE 120 MY LOVE IS LIKE A RED RED ROSE

The song is really a pastiche though so brilliantly woven as to be virtually Burns's work. A suggestion for the first stanza has been found in a blackletter ballad *The Blanton Wife of Castle Gate*—

Her cheeks are like the Roses
That blossom fresh in June
O she's like a new strung instrument
That's newly put in tune

The second and third stanzas borrow from two songs in *The Hornfair Garland*—a chap-book a copy of which is inscribed Robine Burnes aught this brik and no other one song has the line

And the Rocks melt with the Sun
the other has the stanza

The seas they shall run dry
And rocks melt into sands
Then I'll love you still my dear
When all those things are done

Burns's last stanza has been traced to a song called *The True Lovers Farewell* in another chap-book dated 1792

Fare you well my own true love
And fare you well for a while
And I will be sure to return back again
If I go ten thousand mile

These borrowings and assimilations give point to Edward Fitzgerald's comment on this song in his *Letters to Fanny Kemble* (ed 1902 p 21)

PAGE 121 CA THE YOWES

See letter to Thomson (pp 160-1) and notes (Cluden or Cluden is the stream of that name and Lincuden Abbey at its confluence with the Nith near Dumfries)

PAGE 122 CONTENTED W1 LITTLE

See letter to Thomson p 162

PAGE 122 FOR A THAT AND A' THAT

Burns sent this piece to Thomson in January 1795 not for your book but merely by way of *the la bagatelle*, for the piece is not really poetry. It was born really of his sympathy with

the spirit of the French Revolution; and of the slights he suffered about this time among the gentry, because of his reckless expression of that sympathy in his conduct. 'For a' that', till Burns gave it this setting, was merely a stock phrase in parodies of the Highlander's ignorance of Lowland Scots.

PAGE 124. O WERT TROU IN THE CAULD BLAST

Written during the poet's last illness for Jessie Lewars (see note on p. 202), when she played him 'The Wren' (No. 483 in Johnson's *Museum*, vol. v).

PROSE EXTRACTS

PAGE 125, l. 6. *A fountain shut up, &c.* Cf. *Song of Solomon*, iv. 12.: 'a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed'.

l. 11. *a Rhymer from his earliest years.* The occasion of Burns's commencing lover and poet at the age of fourteen is described in the letter to Dr. Moore, see pp. 136-7.

l. 13. *the applause, perhaps the partiality, of Friendship.* The friend was Gavin Hamilton of Mauchline. 'Mr. Hamilton advised him to publish his poems' (Gilbert Burns in his *Memoir*).

PAGE 126, l. 6. *Humility has depressed, &c.* The last sentence (not quite exactly quoted) of Shenstone's essay *On allowing Merit in Others* (*Works*, 1764, ii. 15).

PAGE 127. *Dr. John Moore.* A Glasgow doctor who settled in London in 1778 and turned author: father of Sir John Moore of Corunna. He showed an interest in Burns from the day that Mrs. Dunlop sent him a copy of the *Kilmarnock Poems*. His letters to Mrs. Dunlop were forwarded to Burns, and led to a correspondence between the two men.

PAGE 128, l. 9. *Glencairn.* James Cunningham, 14th Earl of Glencairn, 1749-91. He first met Burns in Edinburgh in 1786, introduced him to Creech the publisher and secured the patronage of the Caledonian Hunt for the Edinburgh edition, helped the poet to obtain an appointment in the Excise, and was regarded by Burns as his principal patron.

l. 19 *Dr. Blair.* The Rev. Hugh Blair, D.D. (1718-1800), one of the ministers of the High Kirk and Professor of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the University of Edinburgh.

PAGE 129. *William Nicol.* A master in Edinburgh High School, with whom Burns grew intimate during the off hours of his stay there. He accompanied Burns on his Highland Tour in 1787, and was the 'hero' of the song *Willie brew'd a Peck o' Maut*. Professor Josiah Walker, who met him with Burns in Blair-Atholl, describes him as 'a man of robust but clumsy person' and a mind to correspond—quoting Burns's remark at the time: 'his mind is like his body, he has a confounded

strong in kneed sort of a soul' Born in 1744 he died in 1797

PAGE 120, l 9 *he falls like Lucifer* &c Shakespeare
Henry VIII iii 2 371-2

James Smith This letter records an incident that happened when Burns was returning from his West Highland tour James Smith born 1765 was the son of a Mauchline merchant and one of Burns's closest friends during the Mossiel period He was with Burns on the visit to Poesie Nancie's tavern which inspired *The Jolly Beggars* Smith had a linen-draper's business in Mauchline for a while in 1787 he removed to Lankithgowshire where he became a partner in the Ayr Print-Works the next year he emigrated to Jamaica where he died

l 30 *Mothie sun sun* in whose beams the moths dance

PAGE 131, l 1 *harst-day harvest-day*

l 8 *Thomas-a-Rhymer's prophecies* Thomas of Erceildunc or Thomas the Rhymer is the earliest name in Scottish poetry His life and work are largely matter of legend, but he seems to have flourished at the end of the twelfth century, and acquired a reputation for soothsaying Burns learned about him no doubt in the version of Blind Harry's *Rallace* that he read for the Rhymer is there introduced at the Abbey of Fife (in Burns's own parish of Tarbolton) prophesying victory for the hero

l 13 *No terra fou but gaylie yet not very drunk but merry* The reference is to the song *We're gaylie yet* in Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs*

l 20 *Jenny Geddes* Burns's favourite mare named after the Jenny Geddes who is said to have sung her riot at the dean's head when the attempt was made in 1637 to introduce Laud's Liturgy in St Giles's Edinburgh

PAGE 132 *Robert Ainslie* Ainslie was born in 1766 at Berrywell near Duns in Berwickshire where his father was a land steward he was serving his apprenticeship to the law in Edinburgh when Burns made his acquaintance On his Border Tour Burns had Ainslie's company as far as Berrywell which served as a sort of head quarters to the poet for the most part of May 1787 It was then that he met the members of the family referred to in the close of this letter Intimate as they were during the Edinburgh period Burns did not find Ainslie the staff of his old age see p 139

l 17 *Though in the morn, &c* This is probably from the old Scotch song well known among the Country 'ingle sides' to which Burns alludes in his *First Commonplace Book* under date September [1785] He could not tell the name of the song or of the tune but the fine Unison of both prompted him to imitation and he gives one of his stanzas

When clouds in skies do come together
 To hide the brightness of the sun,
 There will surely be some pleasant weather
 When a' thir storms are past and gone. [these

To Dr. John Moore. The passages here given from this very important letter are printed for the first time, it is believed direct from the original manuscript, now in the British Museum.

PAGE 133, l. 3. *My ancient but ignoble blood, &c.*: Pope, *Essay on Man*, IV. 211-12.

l. 6. *Keiths of Marshal.* George Keith, the Earl Marischal, proclaimed the Pretender in Aberdeen in 1715. He had a seat at Fetteresso in Kineardineshire, and another at Inverugie in Aberdeenshire. Burns told John Ramsay of Ochertyre, in 1787, that his Jacobite sympathies were 'owing to his grandfather having been plundered and driven out in the year 1715, when gardener to Earl Marischall at Inverury'. Burns's grandfather is known to have rented the farm of Clochnahill in Dunnottar parish, near the Fetteresso seat of the Keiths: but he may not have settled there till after the '15; and Ramsay's 'Inverury' may be a slip for Inverugie.

l. 18. *a worthy gentleman*, William Fergusson of Doonholm, then Provost of Ayr. Prior to engaging with Provost Fergusson, William Burnes had been gardener on two other Ayrshire estates—Fairlie, in Dundonald, and Doonside, the next property to Doonholm.

l. 25. *a small farm*, Mount Oliphant.

PAGE 134, l. 1. *an old Maid of my Mother's*, Betty Davidson, widow of a cousin of Mrs. Burnes (according to the poet's youngest sister, Mrs. Begg).

l. 5. *warlocks, wizards; spunkies, will-o'-the-wisps; helpies, river-demons; dead-lights, ghostly lights*, like a candle flame, foretelling death—sometimes, therefore, called fete-light; *cantraips, effects of magie.*

l. 14. *The vision of Mirza and a hymn of Addison's.* See *The Spectator*, Nos. 159 and 489.

l. 20. *Mason's English Collection.* Arthur Masson's *A Collection of English Prose and Verse for the Use of Schools.*

l. 23. *the life of Hannibal.* Gilbert Burns says this was lent by John Murdoch, whom William Burnes and some of his neighbours hired to teach their children.

l. 24. *the history of Sir William Wallace.* This was Hamilton of Gilbertfield's paraphrase of the *Wallace* of Henry the Minstrel, first published in 1722. Gilbert Burns says it was borrowed from the 'blacksmith who shod our horses', some years after the reading of *Hannibal*.

PAGE 135, l 18 *clouterly* patched

l 22 *One whose heart* &c Gilbert Burns says this was the eldest son of Dr Malcolm of Ayr who went to the East Indies where he had a commission in the army. For *Munny Begum* see *Burke's Speeches on the Impeachment of Warren Hastings*

l 30 *the picture I have drawn of one* See p 82 lines 93-100

l 31 *advanced in life* William Burnes married at the age of 36

PAGE 136, l 16 *my Partner* This was Nellie Kilpatrick daughter of the miller at Perclewan in Dalrymple parish. With the song that Burns made upon her—*O once I lov'd a bonnie lass*—he began his First Commonplace Book in 1783 though by then he regarded it as very puerile and silly

l 20 *sonsie* good natured jolly

PAGE 137, l 15 *a larger farm* Lochlea in Tarbolton

l 24 *To where the wicked* &c Cf Job, iii 17

l 27 *I was at the beginning of this period* &c The preceding paragraph has told in bare outline the story of William Burnes's last years at Mount Oliphant and then at Lochlea. Burns now goes back over this period and through several pages (137-43) expands the outline with reference to himself. The allusion here therefore is to a date shortly before 1775 and to the parish of Alloway (not Tarbolton)

The list of books that follows refers to the same early period. It completes the account of what Burns had read by his seventeenth year (1775). Other works are named on pp 140-3 as additions to his reading made between 1775 and the year of his father's death.

Thomas Salmon's *New Geographical and Historical Grammar* (1749) and William Guthrie's *Geographical Historical and Commercial Geography* (1770) were popular text books of the time from which Burns could acquire more than an elementary knowledge not only of geography but also of the history and contemporary civilization of the chief peoples of the earth. Andrew Tooke's *Pantheon* though only a translation was another popular school manual that told dialogue wise the Fabulous Histories of the Heathen gods and Most Illustrious Heroes. First published in 1698 it had reached a 22nd edition by Burns's day (1767).

The other works in the list are more than text books. Jethro Tull's *Horst hoeing Husbandry or an Essay on the Principles of Tillage and Vegetation* (1733) was the work of a Berkshire farmer (1674-1741). Based on the author's own experiments it advocated the system of pulverizing ground as against manuring and the methods then in vogue. Tull's

principles found favour in his life-time only on the Continent, where they were adopted by (among others) Voltaire. They were re-imported from abroad, and what was sound in the book began to be recognized in Britain, about Burns's time. The Rev. Adam Dickson (1721-76), who attacked Tull in his *Essay on Manures* (1772), also wrote a practical *Treatise on Agriculture* (vol. i, 1762; vol. ii, 1770), to which Burns here refers. James Justice's *British Gardener's Director* (Edinburgh: 1764) was another practical book on husbandry, written for use in the northern parts of the kingdom. These three works perhaps reveal William Burnes rather than his son.

With the theological books it is otherwise. These are primarily interesting as the early training ground of the man who was to puzzle Calvinism in his talk, and to commence poet as the satirist of the 'auld licht' clergy. Thomas Stackhouse's *New History of the Holy Bible from the Beginning of the World to the Establishment of Christianity* (1737) is the book Charles Lamb read as a boy, and describes in his essay on *Witches and other Night Fears*. It so fascinated Lamb by its account of the objections that have been urged against the credibility of Old Testament story—'drawn up with an almost complimentary excess of candour'—that he 'became staggered and perplexed, a sceptic in long-coats'. Its effect on Burns was probably not dissimilar. The *Boyle Lectures* were reasoned, academic sermons or addresses in defence of the Christian religion—so-called because the Lectureship was founded under the will of the Hon. Robert Boyle (1627-91), the discoverer of Boyle's Law. The first lecturer was Bentley, who lectured in 1692-3 on *The Folly and Unreasonableness of Atheism*, a typical theme. John Taylor's *Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination* (1740) had such a vogue that John Wesley replied to it in 1757. Its character may be guessed from an entry in Wesley's *Journal* for 28 August 1748—'Abundance of people we gathered before six, many of whom were disciples of Dr. Taylor, laughing at Original Sin, and, consequently, at the whole frame of scriptural Christianity.'

The Rev. James Herve's *Meditations among the Tombs* (1746) is a document of some importance in the history of taste and literary fashions. A book of morbid reflections in an affected style, it serves to show what Gray's *Elegy* might have been without Gray, and heralds the cult of sensibility that infected our late eighteenth-century writers—Burns, on occasion, among the rest. The *Collection of Songs*, which Burns describes as his 'vade mecum', has not yet been traced. *A Select Collection of English Songs* is the title to a letter of Ritson's anthology (3 vols., London, 1783); and some suppose this to be the work

referred to. But it is by no means certain that Burns is quoting a title. If the use of capitals in this passage of the original letter is any clue it would seem that Burns recalls his books by those parts only of their title pages which his use of them had fixed most firmly in his mind—he names them that is to say as he would have named them to himself on going to his shelves to take one down at need. Pope The Pantheon Locke's Essay Stackhouse Boyle Taylor Hervey. So that his use of a phrase that is the exact title of Ritson's work may be accidental—the most we can infer is that Burns possessed at this time a Collection of English Songs which he thought deserving of special mention in his list. And Ritson's *Collection* is to be rejected on other grounds. Not only is 1783 too late a date of publication to suit the passage as a whole. We have to remember that Burns asked Thomson to procure [him] a sight of Ritson's *Collection of English Songs* in October 1794 and that when Thomson made him a present of the work in reply Burns's acknowledgement gave no hint of his having possessed or seen it before that date.—Henley says (*Essay on Burns* p. 329 note) that the *trade mecum* referred to was *The Lark* (London 1740) but *The Lark* is a collection of English and Scotch songs with a copious Alphabetical Glossary for Explaining the Scotch words—though a first glance at the title page with the words *Lark Collection and Songs* printed prominently in red type might easily lead one to overlook this fact. If guessing were profitable one might suggest *A Collection of Songs* (Edinburgh Printed by A. Donaldson and J. Reid 1762) which is English throughout and might fairly be described as select in its kind. (*A Catalogue of English Song Books forming part of the Library of Sir John Slisner* 1891 records a copy with a manuscript note that the collection was edited by the Rev. William Harper, Episcopal Minister of Leith who died 16 November 1785.) Mrs. Begg Burns's youngest sister said that among her brother's earliest possessions was a copy of Ramsay's *Tea Table Miscellany* the third volume of which consists of English songs.

The other books named in the list need no annotation.

PAGE 138, l. 25 *the blind gropin[g]s* &c. Cf. Pope's *Odyssey* 493-4.

Meantime the Cyclop raging with his wound

Spreads his wide arms and searches round and round—
where the image is rather more prominent than in the original. Burns read Homer in Pope's translation.

PAGE 140, l. 4 *a noted school*. This was at Kirkoswald in the parish where Burns's mother was born and some five miles south west of Maybole.

1. 13. *Virgo*. The sun enters Virgo on 23 August.

1. 14. *a charming Filletie*, 'Peggy' Thomson, who married John Neilson, 'an old acquaintance' of Burns, in 1784.

1. 20. *Like Proserpine*, &c. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, iv. 269-70.

1. 32. *a collection of letters*, &c. 'This book', says Gilbert Burns, 'was to Robert of the greatest consequence. It inspired him with a strong desire to excel in letter-writing, while it furnished him with models by some of the first writers in our language.' He also informs us that it was bought in Ayr, by a brother of Mrs. Burnes, in mistake for 'The Complete Letter-Writer'. It may have been the publishers' venture issued by Briscoe in 1718: *Familiar Letters of Love, Gallantry and Several occasions, by the Wits of the last and present age*; or *An useful and entertaining Collection of Letters . . . by the Most Eminent Hands*, 1745. In Burns's library at his death there was a volume of 'Letters by Pope, Gay, Swift, and other eminent writers.'

PAGE 141, l. 11. *The Man of Feeling*, the novel that made Henry Mackenzie famous; it exploits the sentimental vein of Sterne, and appeared in 1771.

1. 20. *except, Winter, a dirge*, &c. Burns has the Edinburgh (1787) edition in mind, where the songs referred to are (1) *It was upon a Lammas night*; (2) *Now westlin winds, and slaught'ring guns*; (3) *My Nannie O*.

1. 27. *a neighbouring town*, Irvine.

PAGE 142, l. 5. *a belle fille*, probably Ellison Begbie, who rejected Burns's offer of marriage in or about 1781. It was partly his desire to be in a situation to marry that led Burns to try flax-dressing as a means of livelihood.

1. 16. *a young fellow*, Richard Brown. In writing to him on 30 December 1787, Burns recalled these days, and mentions a good turn Brown did him that may balance the mischief here recorded: 'Do you recollect a Sunday we spent together in Eglinton Woods? You told me, on my repeating some verses to you, that you wondered I could resist the temptation of sending verses of such merit to a magazine. It was from this remark I derived that idea of my own pieces which encouraged me to endeavour at the character of a poet.'

PAGE 143, l. 8. *the Welcome inclosed: A Poet's Welcome to his Love-begotten Daughter*, which celebrates the birth of Elizabeth Paton's child in November 1784.

1. 18. *a neighbouring farm*, Mossiel.

1. 30. *Like the dog*, &c. Cf. 2 *Peter*, ii. 22. But the wording is nearer to, and may be a recollection of, the last phrase in the rebuke administered by Rev. William Auld, when Burns stood before the congregation in 1786 for his misdemeanour with

Jean Armour—like the dog to his vomit or like the sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire

l 34 *two rev^d Calvinists*, two Kilmarnock ministers—John Russell and Alexander Moodie (of Riccarton)—both stern Calvinists. Their quarrel is burlesqued in *The Two Herds* or *The Holy Tulye* which is the piece referred to as 'the first of my poetic offspring that saw the light'—i.e. probably the first to be circulated in manuscript copies for no printed copy is known earlier than the Stewart and Meikle Tract of 1796

PAGE 144, l 6 *a certain side* the Moderates or New Licht party in the church

l 7 *Holy Willie's Prayer* See pp 38-41 and note

l 14 *The Lament occasioned by the unfortunate issue of a friend's amour* first published in the Kilmarnock edition was occasioned really by the unfortunate issue of Burns's own amour when Jean Armour agreed to mutilate the written acknowledgement of marriage he had given her

l 18 *I gave up my part* This was on 22 July 1786

PAGE 145, l 15 *The gloomy night* See p 92

l 16 *when a letter from Dr Blacklock &c* Burns in hastening to the end of his story is so brief concerning the consequences of Blacklock's letter that it is easy and common to read too much into what he says. He need not and should not be read as suggesting that it at once put Edinburgh into his head. Thomas Blacklock the blind Edinburgh poet wrote to the Rev George Lawrie minister of Loudoun (near Galston) on 4 September 1786. But the letter did not reach Burns (through Gavin Hamilton) till near the end of the month. Blacklock certainly advises the immediate issue of a second edition but only for the sake of the young man because the Kilmarnock edition had proved too small to meet the demand—and without any mention of Edinburgh. Early in October therefore Burns proposed a second edition to his Kilmarnock publisher. And it was only after he had failed to come to terms with Wilson that he posted to Edinburgh on 27 November. On the same day Blacklock wrote a second time to Lawrie saying he had heard that a second edition of the Poems was projected at the expense of the gentlemen of Ayrshire for the author's benefit—an echo probably of the attempt to republish through Wilson.

l 31 *to catch the manners &c* Pope *Essay on Man* l 14

PAGE 148 *Miss Chalmers* Margaret (Peggy) Chalmers. She and her widowed mother—sister to Mrs Hamilton the widowed step-mother of Burns's patron Gavin Hamilton and to the deceased wife of Alexander Tait, W.S. of Harvieston, in Clackmannanshire—lived in Edinburgh but spent much of

their time at Harvieston, where also Mrs. Hamilton was domiciled (with her children, including the 'Charlotte' of this letter), as housekeeper to Mr. Tait. Rumour has it that Burns, while in Edinburgh, proposed marriage to Peggy Chalmers, but was refused.

1. 7. *Shenstone* says, in his essay *On Reserve* (*Works*, 1764, ii. 55).

1. 25. *hantle o' fauts*, faults not a few.

1. 28. *Carrick*, the southern district of Ayrshire.

PAGE 147. *Mrs. Dunlop*. This was Frances Anna Wallace (1730-1815), daughter of Sir Thomas Wallace of Craigie, and wife of John Dunlop of Dunlop (near Stewarton, Ayrshire), whom she married in 1748. For her correspondence with Burns, see *Robert Burns and Mrs. Dunlop*, by William Wallace, 1898. Burns first met her at Dunlop, after his return from Edinburgh in the summer of 1787. The correspondence between them, which began in November 1786, ceased abruptly on Mrs. Dunlop's side in January 1795: the reason for her apparent neglect of the poet during the last eighteen months of his life is not certainly known.

1. 1. *Dryden's Virgil—the Odyssey—Tasso*. Mrs. Dunlop, on her way through Kilmarnock in the previous March, left 'Pope's *Homer*, Dryden's *Virgil*, and Hoole's *Tasso*' at Wilson's, for Burns: they reached him apparently by 31 March. On 28 April he wrote: 'Virgil, Dryden, and Tasso were all equally strangers to me; but of this more at large in my next'—i.e. the present letter.

29th May, 1788. The earlier part of this letter was begun on 27 May. The extract here given begins the continuation on the 29th.

PAGE 148, 1. 6. *term-day*. Term-day among farmers in Scotland comes twice a year, in May and in November. Leases commonly run from these dates; and farm-servants are then fee'd or engaged for the next six or twelve months.

John Bugeo (1759-1841), engraved from Nasmyth's picture, the head of Burns, published as frontispiece to the Edinburgh edition.

1. 27. *By banks of Nith, &c.* This parodies the metrical version of Psalm cxxxvii, 1-2, as used in the Church of Scotland:

By Babel's streams we sat and wept,
When Sion we thought on.

In midst thereof we hang'd our harps
The willow-trees upon.

PAGE 149. *John Tennant* (1760-1853), farmer at Auchenbay, near Ochiltree; son of John Tennant of Glenconner in the same

neighbourhood who was a witness at the poet's baptism and advised him when he chose Ellisland. Glenconner's brother David recommended Murdoch to William Burnes as a tutor for his family. And Auchenbay had known Burns from the time Murdoch became a master in Ayr and taught them French together.

l 30 *Barguharie* the next farm to Glenconner and the home of George Reid who lent Burns the pony on which he rode to Edinburgh in 1786.

PAGE 150, l 3 *The effectual fervent Prayer &c James*
v 16

l 18 *a Kilmarnock Communion* Holy Communion in the Scottish Church of the eighteenth century was celebrated at most once a year. Several parishes would combine on these occasions and people flocked from all round to the church selected for the celebration. The numbers were so large that whole parties in succession throughout the day attended the Communion service within the church; tent preachings were conducted in the fields about for the rest of the assembly. It was from the need to supply food and drink and from the opportunities for jovial intercourse naturally supplied at such gatherings that Holy Fair (as Burns says) became a common phrase in the West of Scotland for a sacramental occasion. And under this title it was—in his *Holy Fair*—that Burns satirized the tent-preaching or out-of-doors aspect of a Scottish Communion. Here he refers as unsympathetically to the indoors aspect the sternly serious and solemn conduct of the communion service itself. For an account of the rite as a whole see Henry Grey Graham's *Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* chap. viii sect. vii. Kilmarnock was the centre of a district that cultivated Holy Fairs assiduously.

PAGE 151 l 27 *Falconer* In a postscript dated 24 December 1789 Mrs Dunlop wrote enthusiastically of Falconer's *Shipwreck* which she had just read and asked Burns: Can you tell me is it he who is capt. of an East India ship? Burns here replies to her question. William Falconer son of an Edinburgh barber was born in 1732 and was lost at sea in 1769. His *Shipwreck* (1762) was much over rated in its day. His *Dictionary of the Marine* (1769) was a work more within his powers and more deserving of praise.

PAGE 152, l 11 *Little did my mother &c* From the ballad *Mary Hamilton or The Queen's Marse* first published by Sir Walter Scott in *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* 1802.

l 21 *O that my father &c* Possibly another of the songs well known among the Country mgle sides like the one referred to in the letter to Ainslie on p 132.

1. 27. *clocks, beetles.*

PAGE 153. *Peter Hill*, (1754-1837) had been clerk to Burns's Edinburgh publisher, Creech. He set up a book shop of his own in 1788.

1. 1. *I want likewise for myself, &c.* This request for the comic dramatists is in keeping with Ramsay of Ochtertyre's account of a visit he paid to Burns at Ellisland later in the year. In October 1787, at Ochtertyre, he had proposed to Burns 'the writing of a play similar to the "Gentle Shepherd"'. At the meeting in 1790, Burns told him 'that he had now gotten a story for a drama, which he was to call *Rob Macquechan's Elshon* [awl], from a popular story of Robert Bruce being defeated on the Water of Cairn, when the heel of his boot having loosened in his flight, he applied to Robert Macquechan to fit it, who, to make sure, ran his awl nine inches up the King's heel'. Burns 'sketched the outlines of a tragedy' towards the end of the Mount Oliphant period. And the ambition to write for the stage was re-awakened at this later period by his interest in the Dumfries theatre: two prologues of his composition were spoken there on 1 January and on 3 March 1790. But the play never got written. As Ramsay foresaw in 1787, 'steadiness and abstraction from company were wanting, not talents'.

1. 27. *wipe away all tears, &c.* Cf. *Revelation*, vii. 17. Burns names this passage in a letter to his father, in 1781, as one he was 'more pleased with . . . than with any ten times as many verses in the whole Bible'.

PAGE 154. *Helen Craik*, one of the Craiks of Arbigland, near Kirkbean, Kirkcudbrightshire. Burns was probably introduced to them by Capt. John Hamilton, his Dumfries landlord, who was a connexion of the Craiks.

Alexander Findlater (1758-1839), Supervisor of Excise in Dumfries at the date of this letter. Peterkin's edition of Burns's *Works* (1815) includes a letter from him in defence of the poet's character against the strictures of Currie and his successors.

1. 27. *Mr. Lorimer*, William Lorimer, a farmer who dealt also in teas and spirits. He went to Edinburgh the previous month on law business: and Burns gave him a letter of introduction to a lawyer there, commending him 'as a man of property and consequence'. The smuggling propensities of Lorimer apparently broke no friendships. His daughter, Jean, became the 'Chloris' of Burns's songs a few years later; she was the 'Lassie wi' the lintwhite-locks'.

PAGE 155, 1. 22 *Mr. Clarke*, James Clarke, teacher at Moffat, who in the previous June became (as Burns puts it) 'the unfortu-

nate and undeserved subject of persecution from some of his employers and in whose cause Burns exerted himself all he could. The Patrons of the school were the Ministers Magistrates and Town Council of Edinburgh and Clarke at last, with the help of Burns's pen and purse succeeded in bringing his case before them—though his enemies tried hard to prevent this—and won. At the date of this letter Clarke was on the eve of setting out for the hearing before the Patrons in Edinburgh.

l 26 *Fergusson* The erection of a stone over the grave of Fergusson in Edinburgh was an act of sincere homage on Burns's part. J and R Burns who had the order in 1787 completed the work and rendered their account 23 June 1789—with facetious apologies for the delay.

PAGE 156, l 4 *Office of a Messenger* A Treatise on the Office of a Messenger (Edinburgh 1753)—a book Burns would need as an exciseman: it described the procedure for dealing with law breakers and for enforcing the penalties of the law.

l 6 *Observer* This was the periodical by Richard Cumberland (1732-1811) which appeared from 1785 to 1790.

l 8 *maukin hare*

George Thomson (1757-1851) was Clerk to the Board of Trustees for the Encouragement of Art and Manufactures in Scotland. His hobby was music and both as a violinist and as a singer he was well known in the Edinburgh of his day. He was the leading spirit in the project formed in 1792 to publish a collection of Scottish songs with accompaniments by famous Continental composers which resulted in his *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs*: it appeared vol. 1 in two parts, the remaining four volumes entire at long intervals between 1793 and 1818.

PAGE 157, l 12 *I have some particular reasons* &c. Burns was now in Dumfries entirely dependent on the Excise but the promotion he hoped for on giving up Ellisland in November 1791 seemed as far off as ever. He may have thought it likely to hinder promotion altogether if the full extent of his literary commitments was noised abroad. He was already busy enough on two publications—a new edition of his *Poems* (which appeared in 1793) and the fifth volume of Johnson's *Scotts Musical Museum* (the fourth volume of which had only recently appeared).

l 15 *Tarbolton Mill, Wallace's Mill* (William Muir's) of *Death and Doctor Hornbook*: see p. 42. Mrs Muir sheltered Jean Armour when her parents turned her out of doors in 1788.

PAGE 158, ll 5-13 *well waled carefully chosen lug ear*

l 18 *Fraser's hautboy* Thomas Fraser (1770-1825) played the oboe in the orchestra of the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh when

Burns was there. In 1793 he was in Dumfries training the band of a Fencible Corps, and Burns renewed his acquaintance. He excelled in airs suggesting at once the pathetic and the comic, like *Fee him, father, fee him*, which he performed on his benefit night in 1824 'in the manner in which he played it to Burns'.

l. 22. *my yesternight's evening-walk*. According to John Syme, with whom Burns took a trip into Galloway (27 July-2 August 1793), this song was begun on 31 July, as they crossed the moors between Kenmure and Gatehouse in a violent thunderstorm, and finished on 2 August on the way home to Dumfries from St. Mary's Isle, the Earl of Selkirk's seat, where they had spent the previous night. Syme says that Burns gave him a copy of the verses on 3 August. If Syme is right, Burns can only have given a final polish to the song in his 'yesternight's evening-walk'. (See also next note.)

PAGE 159, l. 1. *Urbani*. Pietro Urbani (1749-1816), who had settled in Edinburgh. Burns thought him 'a narrow, conceited creature', but admitted that he sang 'delightfully'. He was of the company assembled at St. Mary's Isle, when Burns and Syme were there on 1 August, and took part in an evening that was given up to Scottish song, and that no doubt was the occasion of Burns's showing him the air. This postscript, in consequence, has been taken to favour a later date than Syme's for the composition of *Scots wha hae*. But Syme is probably right: for the gist of Burns's statement here is simply that he disagreed with Urbani's preference for 'soft verses' (as against his 'heroic' ones) for 'Hey, tutti, taitie'. We may judge who had the better sense of the air from Lady Nairne's *Land o' the Leal*.

l. 5. *some other struggles*, the French Revolution.

l. 7. *Clarke*. Stephen Clarke, organist of the Episcopal Chapel of Edinburgh, harmonized the airs for Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*. He was in Dumfriesshire at this time, Burns having recommended him as music-master to the family of John M'Murdo, chamberlain to the Duke of Queensberry at Drumlanrig.

Mrs. M'Lehose, Burns's Clarinda. She was Agnes Craig, daughter of a surgeon in Glasgow, and cousin to Lord Craig, who befriended her in her worst times. Born in April 1759, she married John M'Lehose of Glasgow in 1776. The marriage proving unhappy, they separated in 1780. Her husband went to Jamaica in 1784, where he died in 1812. From 1782, Mrs. M'Lehose lived in Edinburgh, where Burns first met her in December 1787. She died in 1841. This letter is the last that Burns is known to have written to her.

l. 23. *Ainslie*. See p. 132 and note.

PAGE 160, l 12 *handwaled choicest shellies squints
tinkler tinker elout mend.*

l 31 *Ca the voices &c* i.e. the air which Burns says he got Stephen Clarke to take from the singing of the Rev John Clunzie and sent with an amended version of the words to Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (vol. iii 1790) Clunzie (? 1757-1819) who was licensed by the Presbytery of Edinburgh in 1784 became minister of Ewes in Dumfriesshire in 1790 and of Borthwick Melothian in 1791 At the time Burns and Clarke met him he was schoolmaster at Markinch in Fife

PAGE 161, l 13 *your elegant present* This was an engraving to illustrate *The Cotter & Saturday Night* on which David Allan (1744-96) had been at work since April 1794 Burns looked on Mr Allan and Mr Burns to be the only genuine and real painters of Scottish costume in the world

l 18 *sae henspeckle* so easily recognizable

l 27 *ill-deedie mischievous cumble-gairie* disorderly forward hurchin urchin

PAGE 162, l 2 *named Hittie Nicol, &c* William Nicol Burns born 2 April 1701 was named after the William Nicol of the letter on p 129— a prodigy of learning and genius and a pleasant fellow though no saint as Thomson says in his reply to this letter

l 7 *an artist of very considerable merit &c* Neither the artist nor the small miniature here referred to seems to have been traced as yet The artist may have been Alexander Reid (1747-1823) of whom Burns wrote to Mrs Walter Riddell some eight months later (29 January 1796) I am just sitting to Reid in this town [Dumfries] for a miniature and I think he has hit by far the best likeness of me ever taken But the miniatures are hardly likely to be one and the same

l 13 *Contented as Hittie &c* See p 122

James Johnson an engraver and music seller in Edinburgh whose *Scots Musical Museum* appeared in 6 vols between 1787 and 1803 This work accounts in some measure for Burns's preoccupation with Scottish song after the Edinburgh days for Burns was not only interested in it from the start after the first volume he as good as edited it till his death

l 16 *Mr Lewis* an exciseman with whom Burns was intimate His daughter Jessie helped to nurse the poet in his last illness and was the heroine of some of his latest songs She is the 'friend' for whom Burns asks a copy of the *Museum* in the end of this letter

PAGE 163, l 4 *your Publication* In April 1793 Burns had written to Thomson *Your book will be the standard of Scots*

songs for the future : let this idea ever keep your judgment on the alarm.' But the words there were less a prophecy than a threat. Burns was anxious to know the songs to be included in Thomson's first volume (which appeared the next month) ; and Thomson seemed shy of giving the information.

Alexander Cunningham, a nephew of Principal Robertson of the University, practised law in Edinburgh ; but before he died in 1812, went into partnership with a goldsmith. Burns met him in 1786-7, probably in the club of jovial, free-spoken fellows known as the Crochallan Fencibles ; and the two were close friends ever after. Burns's son (born on the day of the poet's funeral) was to have been named Alexander Cunningham after his friend. From what remains of their correspondence, it is clear that Burns found Cunningham a man to meet his every mood. It was Cunningham who, at Burns's death, originated the subscription and the scheme for a collected edition of the Works, on behalf of the family.

PAGE 164, l. 18. *Rothiemurchie*, a strathspey tune, to which Burns in 1794 had sung his 'Lassie wi' the lintwhite locks'. The song he now composed to it—his last—was *Fairest Maid on Devon Banks*.

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